

A History of the Sudanese Communist Party

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**A submission presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of South Wales / Prifysgol De Cymru
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2019

This is to certify that the work described in this thesis and portfolio is my own. No part of this thesis or portfolio has been presented or is currently submitted in candidature for any degree at any other university.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people who have helped and supported me during this research.

First and foremost I would like to thank my interviewees without whom this work would not have been possible. They gave generously of their time and knowledge, sharing the details of their lives and experience with me. Thanks, too, to my friends in the UK and abroad who helped me obtain more obscure written source materials.

Warm thanks are due to all the staff and former staff – academic, library and administrative – at the University of South Wales who have helped me during the writing of this thesis. It has been a long and difficult process, severely hampered by my chronic pain and ill health and I am grateful for their patient support. In particular would like to thank Dr Glenn Jordan, Professor Sharif Gemie, Dr Norman LaPorte, Professor Hamish Fyfe and Professor Ruth McElroy.

Special thanks are also due to Professor Chris Weedon for her help and support.

I want to thank my grandfather Abbas Sidahmed who took me to school on my first day despite being paralysed on one side. He supported me throughout my education. Every year on 1st January, which is Liberation Day in Sudan, he asked me to hang the Sudanese flag in the roof of the house and he turned on the radio to listen to patriotic songs. About five years ago, while doing my research for this thesis, I found his name among the founders of the

Labour Trade Unions. I also wish to thank my grandmother Amna Fageer Hamid Baharia, my mother Hafsa Abbas, my father Abdelgadir and my brother Abdelmoniem. My uncles Abdien, Jafar and Mahjoub Abbas influenced me profoundly. I learned from them how to become a fighter for social justice and human rights. Together with my aunts Khadija and Batoul, they have given me all kinds of support throughout my life.

My wife Amel Elkonti and our daughters Minass and Sara have been an ongoing source of strength and have helped to make this thesis possible.

My First head teacher Mohammed ElHasan Koko. My special friends, Prof Farouk Mohammed Ibrahim, Prof Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, Dr Siddig Elzailae, Mubarak Ali Osman Eldaw, Mohammed Ibrahim Abdo Kabaj, Micheal Picardi the Late Makki Aldukhri.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to memory of all those who have fought for democracy and social justice in Sudan, in particular the late Elkhatim Adlan.

Summary

This thesis addresses the largely untold history of communism in Sudan in its changing political and social context. After overthrowing Ottoman-Egyptian rule in 1885, Sudan became effectively a British colony under the Condominium Rule of Britain and Egypt in 1898. During this period, 1898-1956, Sudan underwent major transformations from a subsistence agricultural economy to an agricultural exporting economy. With the coming of forms of modernisation, political movements gradually developed, reaching a peak in the 1940s, when the major political parties were established. These post-war years were a period marked by anticolonial struggle.

The Sudanese Communist Party was initially founded in 1946 as an anticolonial movement known as HASITO. Ten years later it formally became the Sudanese Communist Party. The thesis traces the party's development from 1946 to the present looking in particular at its structure and day-to-day practice. These are areas that have not been examined in detail before. For most of this time it functioned as an underground party. Much of the originality of the thesis for Sudanese political history lies in its use of rich oral history data which throws light on unexplored dimensions of the party including the daily lives and work of cadres both above and underground.

For this research I interviewed twenty-six members and former party members about their lives in the Communist Party. Their combined stories, read alongside and against official documents and available secondary literature have enabled me to put together the most detailed picture to date of the culture, organisation and workings of the party. This original research adds a new dimension to the available written literature on the Sudanese Communist Party together with an archive of oral history interviews that future researchers will be able to

access. It makes an original contribution both to Sudanese political history and international communist studies.

I was motivated to write this thesis about the SCP because it played such a formative role in my early years in Sudan. It was this early experience and the people I got to know from my own involvement with the party at that time that enabled me to gain access to interviewees who had never spoken out before. From a Western perspective, the thesis is of particular interest for the light it sheds on how a largely underground Communist movement functioned in a developing society, governed by a traditional, largely oral, Muslim culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Why this topic

Being a member of a political party, especially the Communist Party in a developing country like Sudan, is difficult and can have many unpleasant consequences, indeed it can be extremely difficult to practice politics without involving personal risk. This thesis addresses a largely untold history of the Sudanese Communist Party and the people who dedicated large parts of their lives to the socialist cause. Since independence from Britain in 1956, Sudan has gone through frequent periods of dictatorship by governments that have stood against democracy and done their best to fight the very existence of democratic parties. The unstable nature of democracy in Sudan has produced three military coups followed by military dictatorships. The first and second periods of military government were from 17 November 1958 to 21 October 1964 (Ibrahim Aboud), and 25 May 1969-6 April 1985, the regime of Jaffar Numeiri. The third coup on 30 June 1989 produced an Islamist dictatorship that remains in power today. Each of these regimes was characterised by political repression and resistance and communists figured largely in both.

As outlined in more detail later in this chapter, at the beginning of the 1970s Numeiri sought a short, temporary alliance with the Sudanese Communist Party. At this time Numeiri's main supporters included four army officers who were members of the SCP. In July 1971 this resulted in a failed coup led by Major Hashim al-Atta (1936-71) against Numeiri. Al-Atta had served on the National Revolutionary Command Council under Numeiri.¹ The coup only

¹ The National Revolutionary Command Council that was the governing body set up by Numeiri following the 1969 military coup.

lasted a few days and was brutally suppressed. In addition to those directly involved, influential leaders of the SCP were executed, including Abdelkhaig Mahjoub, who was the General Secretary of the party, while other SCP members were sent to prison.² At that time I was a young boy, about five years old. Some of my family members and their friends were members of SCP and so they were sent to prison in my hometown of Kosti, which is located in central Sudan. At that time, in the early 1970s, Kosti was witnessing a huge inward movement of skilled labour to meet the needs of the river transport corporation, the railway corporation and other factories and companies. Although I was a very young boy, I was responsible for delivering food to the members of my family in prison and as a result I was well known to all the SCP members there. Also they regularly sent messages with me to their families and friends. Through this experience I developed a close relationship with the members of SCP and I began to listen to their conversations and discussions. These were full of challenging ideas and the belief that they would succeed in establishing socialism in the Sudan one day. After they were released, they continued their political activities. I came to know the fundamental issues in communism from their discussions and I read their underground newspaper. Gradually I became a communist. I was impressed by their humane qualities and honesty. Most of them were educated and intellectual and participated actively in all local social activities. It was the existence of underground cadres in our house, however, that made the greatest impression on me. A lot of them stayed secretly with us and they held meetings in the house. In this way I met Muhammad Ibrahim Nugud, the General Secretary of the SCP and other leading figures such as Abdullahi Ibrahim and Alkhatim Adlan. Gizoli Said All these men belonged to the leadership of the SCP. They shared the house with us. I knew them and their fellow party members personally and they trusted me fully so that small tasks

² While Mahjoub did not support the coup, the SCP leadership was accused of masterminding it because of the involvement of the communist army officers. Mahjoub was offered asylum by the GDR (East German) Embassy but refused, as he saw it, to abandon the struggle in Sudan by going into exile.

were given to me, such as making contacts with other members and arranging meetings. I was charged with observing the street and telling them if there were any signs of something suspicious. From those early days, I gained experience and knowledge of underground work and cadres. I joined the SCP in 1983 during the Numeiri regime and spent three months in a party 'School for Cadres' where I attended the basic courses. I was responsible for the production of the notice board magazine in the school. I attended the first meeting of SCP students sectors, where the meeting was at Osama Abdelwahab's house. The meeting was attended by Ibrahim Fath Alrahman who was the political official in addition to Osama Abdelwahab, Adeeb Ahmed Satti, Hatim Babiker and me.

When I joined the SCP in Kosti, party members were very few in number, maybe less than a 100, but they were nonetheless influential. They were involved in most social, political and cultural activities in the town including weddings, births and funerals. Here they would help prepare for the ceremonies, including digging graves. Members were expected by the party to be generally involved in society at large and to be recognisable as good, trustworthy people. I think the strategic plan of the SCP was to make their members generally accessible and to encourage as much community participation as possible. Members were placed in organisations according to need and their personal qualities and qualifications.

In the late days of the Numeiri regime, the SCP played a central role in gathering together the opposition and organising people to stand up to the regime. We were asked to activate the protests and arrange all sorts of forms of resistance. It was during one such demonstration that I was badly beaten by the security forces and hospitalised; I was left with serious, lifelong injuries. During the third phase of democracy in Sudan (1985 – 1989), when the party could operate openly, I was trained to participate in producing *Al Shabiba* (the Youth's newspaper),

which was issued by the Sudanese Youth Union, through which the SCP aimed to attract young people. My salary was nothing compared with the duties that I had to fulfil. Although the salary was very small, I was satisfied. Many of my relatives supported me. They sent money, books and clothes regularly. It was hard work but beneficial and gave me particular skills. I also travelled in Africa and the Middle East with the Sudanese Youth Union.

No one had forced me to join the SCP; I had strong faith in the idea that the SCP was the most suitable party through which deep-rooted **change** could be brought about in Sudan. Moreover, I had witnessed how the party and its members made great sacrifices and I cannot deny their effective participation and influence in Sudan. They developed their work in many sectors such as among workers, women and youth, as well as among students, and they trained some members of these sectors to become involved in development and change.

One of the main challenges for party members was to practice democracy inside the SCP and it was the failure to do this that eventually led to my leaving the party. Members of the SCP were not allowed to criticise communist theory in any way. Leading or participating in any criticism of the party led and still leads to problems such as the isolation of the member who is then forced to write self-criticism. You could be stigmatised as a person who works against SCP's system. In October 1988, I went to Damascus University for five years where I studied philosophy, some psychology and continued my political activities, attending courses offered by some of the pan Arab parties and the Arab Youth Union. Damascus was a meeting point for communists and socialists from the Gulf countries, North Africa and other Arab states, reaching from the Western desert to Yemen. This was a time of lively discussion and critiques of Leninist models of communism and my already growing critique of the lack of the democracy in the Sudanese Communist Party only increased. In the wake of *Perestroika*,

Commented [M1]:

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which aimed to reform the economic and political system in the former Soviet Union, my faith in the SCP diminished further and I came to believe that communist theory was not able to achieve justice, equality and democracy in Sudan. I no longer believed that the SCP offered the way forward for Sudan and as a result, I abandoned the party, although I still have strong social relations with some SCP leaders and members. These relationships have facilitated this research and the oral history on which it is largely based.

In 1995 I went from Damascus to Egypt for some months to prepare for resistance to the Sudanese government. Our plan was to go to Eritrea to gain military training but this did not come off. While I was in Egypt, my two uncles Jaffar Abbas in Qatar Mahjoub Abbas in Saudi supported me financially. From Egypt I went to Odessa in the Ukraine with another Sudanese colleague to study Russian and I registered for a masters degree on the Islamic movement in Sudan. I stayed there for less than a year because it proved to be too unsafe. Sudanese students were monitored and threatened by Islamist fundamentalists linked to the Muslim Brothers. We explored various possibilities for political asylum including the USA and Canada and found ourselves dealing with exploitative people traffickers. We ended up in the Netherlands where I spent nearly two years in asylum camps and centres before being granted refugee status.

I was motivated to write this thesis about the SCP because it played such a formative role in my early years in Sudan and has an important and largely unknown history. From a Western perspective, it is of particular interest to understand how a largely underground movement functioned in a developing society, governed by a traditional, largely oral, Muslim culture. Moreover, its members sacrificed themselves in their stand against all types of dictatorships. When I went to study in Syria, I took a large collection of original materials with me, which I

lost when I became a political refugee in 1997. I lived in political exile as a refugee in the Netherlands for eight years, where I learned Dutch and worked helping other asylum seekers in various centres and as a journalist. My flight as a refugee from Sudan meant that I lost some of the original source materials that inform this thesis. I have lived in the UK for twelve years and have learned English here. I continue to write journalism in Arabic. In what follows, I make a serious attempt to understand the place, role and functioning of the Communist Party in Sudan.

1.2 The Political History of Sudan: a Brief Overview

In 1898 Sudan became effectively a British colony under the Condominium Rule of Britain and Egypt. In practice Britain was the sole governor. During the colonial period, 1898-1956, Sudan underwent major transformations from a subsistence agricultural economy to an agricultural exporting economy that specialised in cotton and some other agricultural products. With the coming of forms of modernisation, described in detail in Chapter 2, political movements gradually developed. This development reached its peak in the 1940s, when the major political parties were established.³ Prior to the 1940s, two major Sufi sects in the Sudan had influenced the political arena. The main one was the Ansar, led by the Al-Mahdi family, which dominated the West and Central provinces of the Sudan. This sect has been described by historians as pro-British.⁴ The rival sect was the Khatmiya. It was led by the Mirghani family and had its strongest bases in Khartoum, the East, and the Northern

³ For English language histories of Sudan see P.M. Holt and M.W. Daly, *A History of the Sudan: from the coming of Islam to the Present Day*, London and New York: Longman, 1988; Robert O. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, Cambridge, CUP, 2008; Bennette LaVerle (ed.), "Sudan a country study", Federal Research Division Library of Congress, 2015, available at http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/pdf/CS_Sudan.pdf; John Ryle, Justin Willis, Suliman Baldo and Jok Madut Jok (eds) "The Sudan Handbook", Rift Valley Institute, 2012 available at <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/51d3d28c4.pdf>.

⁴ See, Sudan Studies Centre, "Mozakirat-Abdrahman-Almahdi"[Memoirs of Imam Abd al-Rahman Al-Mahdi], Cairo, Egypt, p. 5.

Provinces. It has been described as a pro-Egyptian political movement.⁵ The Umma Party (Nation Party) emerged from the first of these two sects, formed by the followers of the Ansar sect and led by the son of the Al-Mahdi. From the Khatmiya came the Unionist Parties, later unified as one party called the National Unionist Party which was led by the Mirghani. The relationship between politics and religion in these parties was and remains deep. The leaders of the two parties were adept at exploiting religion to rally support from the illiterate population.

Other parties established in the 1940s included the anti-colonial Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (SMNL known as HASITO derived from its Arabic name), which was the forerunner of the Sudanese Communist Party and was founded in 1946. It was established by a group of young students, workers and employees. The main sites of HASITO were greater Khartoum and major towns in the North and later in West and southern Sudan. At the same time, the Muslim Brothers Group was also established by young students and was mainly found in higher secondary schools and the university (there was only one university in Khartoum until 1977 when a second university was established in Juba).⁶ The main agenda of this party included resisting and undermining communist thought and culture and establishing a state based on Sharia law. In this sense it was from the start an Islamist party that refused secularism and any distinction between state and religion. To a limited degree, political development also reached South Sudan, which had been a closed area since 1922, after the colonial government issued a law prohibiting contact between the North and South.⁷ The

⁵ See, for example, Beshir, Mohamed Omer. *Tariekh Alharak Alwataniah fi Alsoudan 1900-1969* (History of Nationalist Movement in Sudan 1900-1969, Aldar Alsoudaniyah, 1991 (in Arabic) Translated by H. Riyad et al.

⁶ For more on the Muslim brothers see Zahid, Mohammed and Medley, Michael, 'Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt & Sudan,' *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 33, No. 110, Religion, Ideology & Conflict in Africa (Sep., 2006), pp. 693-708.

⁷ The Colonial Administration separated the South from the North by issuing the Closed Areas Ordinance, which prohibited any contact with southerners. Due to this, no investment or trade was possible. The colonial administration executed what was called its 'Southern Policy' excluding the Northerners from the

colonial administration considered such a policy would be in the best interest of the Southerners. Northern traders, administrators and others were prohibited from entering the South. Only in 1947, when the Juba Conference was held, could the Southerners' and Northerners' political elites unite. In 1953 the first political party was established in South Sudan, the Liberal Party. Sudan became independent of British control in 1956, following three transitional years, 1953-1956, when Egypt and Great Britain agreed to give the Sudanese people the right to self-determination.

It was only after independence, in the course of the 1960s, that Arab Nationalist, Ba'athist and Nasserite parties developed. They began as groups of individuals without a real organisational structure. Then in 1962-63, the Sudanese Ba'athist Party was established. Its main rank and file were university students and it was concentrated in Khartoum and some larger towns. Both parties' rank and file consisted of students and some employees in both the public and private sectors. They were urban political parties and had close ties with the Nasserite Regime in Egypt and the Regional Ba'athist Party headquartered in Iraq.

The political context within which the SCP developed was influenced by Sudan's geographical location between the Arab and Islamic north and Christian African South Sudan. Yet it is more important still to recognise that the political system that developed in the 1940s was a response to organised anti-colonialism and it was in this context that the SCP grew out of the HASITO. This process was influenced by both the Egyptian Communist Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Alongside anti-colonial struggle, the Cold War context would also prove to be decisive for the

administration, trade and settlement in the South. The Policy was said to be in the best interest of the Southerners. For more details see: David Nailo N. Mayo, "The British Southern Policy in Sudan: An Inquiry into the Closed District Ordinances (1914-1946)", *Northeast African Studies*, Volume 1, Numbers 2-3, 1994 (New Series), Michigan State University Press, pp. 165-185.

development of the SCP bringing both about hostile CIA involvement and supportive training and some limited funds from Moscow and the Eastern Bloc which was used to finance the party and, not least, its military training.⁸

1.3 The Sudanese Communist Party

This thesis is a study of the Sudanese Communist Party, its origins, structure and functioning, its position within Sudanese society and its relation to Islam. It draws heavily on my personal involvement with the party and the oral history interviews with party members and former members that this facilitated. An important issue tackled by this research concerns the location of the SCP in a predominantly underdeveloped oral, Muslim society. Key questions here include the position of the SCP on the issues of religion and culture. Contrary to European CPs, the issue of religion was and remains highly sensitive, especially when we consider the Sudan's geopolitical position as a link between black Africa and the Arab nations. The north of the Sudan was predominantly influenced by Arabic culture, language and religion i.e. Islam, while in South Sudan Christianity remains predominant alongside traditional African religions. Contrary to most European experiences of communism, religion was not rejected by the SCP. The party policy was to separate religion and the state and give the citizen freedom of religion and thought, something for which Sudanese society was and is still fighting. From its inception, the SCP has had to take account of the grounding of Sudanese culture in Islam in all its areas of organisation and work. This was not an easy task for a party that claimed to adhere to Marxism. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

⁸ While I found little published material on the effects of the cold war on the SCP, more general points are made in the chapter on 'Africa' in C. Andrews/V. Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way* and in chapters summarising the wider Cold War in the Middle East and Africa in MP Leffler/OD Westad (eds.), *The Cold War*, 3 volumes. My interviewees were able to supplement this scarcity of written sources.

Published material on the Sudanese Communist party is limited in both Arabic and English. In my attempt to find relevant documents I consulted the CPGB archive held at the People's History Museum, Manchester but this only turned up a small amount of useful material.⁹ I also accessed the available digitised Comintern Archives¹⁰ and the National Archives in London. The National Archives yielded some declassified files of British intelligence about the early stages of communism in the Sudan. I looked carefully at the material available in Arabic including Siddig Elzailae's recent edited book "The Sudanese Left and the Russian Revolution: the Impact of Victory and the Lessons of Collapse" which is devoted to the theme of the October Revolution 1917 and its aftermath and impact upon The International Communist Movement (ICM) with a special focus on the SCP.¹¹ The book is the first publication of its kind to discuss this issue in relation to the Sudan and also the Arab World. The Arab Communist movements have still not disclosed information about their relation with the ICM. Aspects of this are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

While I have consulted available sources in both English and Arabic, perhaps the most important source of my thesis is the oral history interviews with party members and former party members including leaders of the party that I have conducted over several years. I discuss my approach to my materials below. Taken together with its forerunner HASITO (founded 1946), the Communist Party is one of the older Sudanese political parties. It has always had a small membership, but as I will argue in detail throughout this thesis, it has at

⁹ These included, for example, a party resolution from August 1970, a Soviet Central Committee letter offering advice from 1970, a document from the SCP Central Committee and excerpts from newspapers about the coup of 1971.

¹⁰ <https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/comintern/comintern-project.html>

¹¹ In this text a group of 12 researchers and activists tackle the issue from different perspectives. While some researchers focus on the impact of the Soviet Union on the SCP, others discuss the broader issue of why the Socialist State collapsed. Two chapters were translated contributions, these are: "Capital and its Importance" by Ulrike Herrmann, and the other "What shall Marx say to us Today" by Hans-Werner Sin. Another two chapters were contributed by Arabic Researchers: Yaser Salih, "The centenary of October Revolution: the twentieth Century Engine"; and Atmish Sadig, "Dialectic of Theory and Practice". Manchester Private press: Afag Gadidah (New Horizons for Research [Arabic] press), 2017.

times been very effective in organising resistance to exploitative work and social relations and to dictatorships. In the process its relation to traditional Sudanese culture and to Islam have both been crucial to its success and survival. Throughout its history, the SCP has faced many serious enemies, both domestically and internationally. Since it was founded, the party has mostly had to work underground. This factor together with the party's reliance on many Soviet-influenced Marxist-Leninist structures and modes of operation has meant that both party leaders and members of the SCP have been largely silent about its internal workings since its inception. Ordinary Sudanese people and researchers have only been able to gain glimpses of what was happening inside this party on rare occasions, mostly during those brief interludes when a change of government meant that it was able to function openly, and in particular at important moments of change in the course of its development. Such crucial moments were mostly the result of internal intellectual or organizational conflict that most of the time led to a split and the expulsion of members for non-compliance with the party line. At such moments, expelled party members would tell their stories. On other occasions, when the party faced a large-scale security breach or suppression from successive regimes, stories would also be told. While none of these stories is enough in itself, every story offers a fraction of information from which to build a more complete picture. For this research I have interviewed twenty-six members and former members about their lives in the Communist Party. I also interviewed four Iraqi communists and one Egyptian. Their combined stories, read alongside and against official documents and available secondary literature have enabled me to put together the most detailed picture to date of the culture, organisation and workings of the party. This original research adds a new dimension to the available written literature on the Sudanese Communist Party together with an archive of oral history interviews that future researchers will be able to access.

In Sudan, the SCP's main enemies throughout its lifetime have been right-wing parties and in particular, some members of the clergy, often attached to specific political parties and the main Islamist party, the Muslim Brothers. Other parties used different arguments and political methods against the party, including violence against individual members of the SCP, specifically in higher education institutions.¹² These have included enemies, who knowing the culture and ways of thinking of the Sudanese people well and the weak points in the SCP programme and debates, have been able to use this knowledge to their advantage to discredit the party and belittle its effectiveness. The party itself has tried throughout its history to avoid violent confrontation, preferring peaceful dialogue and discussions. While the party's enemies have used tools such as liberal thought, the most effective weapon to halt the growing influence of the party, has been religion **by accusing the party of atheism**.¹³ These battles were waged in work places and factories and at the level of communities. However, as I shall attempt to show in the course of this thesis, the SCP's tactics, strategies and the flexibility of its leadership have on occasions enabled it to convert enemies into partners and competitors into coalition allies. Internationally, the party and its forerunner HASITO came under attack from Western powers, starting with the British colonial authorities. After independence, with the Cold War raging, the CIA was active in attempts to undermine the appeal and legitimacy of the party.

The moments of growth and retraction in the history of the Sudanese Communist Party are closely linked to broader political developments in the history of the Sudan. Since

12. This happened at the University of Khartoum, Cairo University-Khartoum Branch, Gezira, Juba, Omdurman Islamic Universities and Khartoum Polytechnic. Incidences of violent confrontation in the seventies, eighties and nineties were well documented at the time in newspapers and pamphlets much of which were underground and are now lost **because of poor preservation**.

¹³. Some of the Sudanese political parties depend on religion to get popular support utilizing disinformation and illiteracy of the supports. In this context, political parties, particularly the Muslim Brothers, utilized this weapons against SCP.

independence, Sudan has been caught up in a vicious circle in which democratic regimes have been transformed into military dictatorships followed by political uprisings and the temporary re-establishment of a democratic regime. On rare occasions this has created conditions in which the political elites and leaders of all political parties, including the SCP, might come together. When this happened, for example in 1964, against the General Aboud regime and in 1985 against the Numeiri regime, the SCP was able to transcend the ideological and religious hurdles repeatedly used against it. Yet even in the most encouraging moments there have remained groups and individuals in which the political sphere which would resort to or condone confrontation with the SCP.

My research project posed a number of challenges. The first of these was writing about an organisation which very little has been written before in either Arabic or English. Most of what has been written concerning Sudanese political parties has analysed the overall political context. This research has not investigated the internal organization of these parties or analysed their structures, but existing studies have dealt with political parties largely within the context of the overall history of Sudan. Moreover, the SCP remains the least known political entity in the political arena in Sudan. Only with the current wave of journalists and the internet and communications revolution, have Sudanese researchers begun to write about this subject in depth and in full detail. Writings have been confined to journalistic essays on current issues or on the prevailing positions taken by the SCP.¹⁴ Thus there is a real lack of information in this area. Written materials dealing with the programmes and party politics of the SCP, do not address the dynamic processes of the party. In contrast to other journalists and researchers, I have had privileged access to interviewing the SCP members on whose life stories this research has drawn.

¹⁴ See for example commentaries in www.sudaneseonline.com on religion.
<http://www.sudaress.com/sudaneseonline/25295>

A second challenge is that any attempt at doing justice to the history of the Sudanese Communist Party requires creating an understanding of the history and culture of the Sudanese people. As a largely oral society, their history and culture is mostly available in stories and verbal recollections. Here too, I have had privileged access to relevant source materials. Thirdly, the SCP has surrounded its internal structure, membership, and its leaders with secrecy. This research seeks to unveil this and to directly address these structures, activists and leaders and to talk about their daily lives, their intimate concerns, and about organisational structures, decisions and many other issues. This makes this research both original and currently unique. The research, the purpose of which to uncover 'the truth', has broken the rules of secrecy, which have been largely adhered to by members since the inception of the SCP as a form of protection against hostile state-apparates and fierce competitors such as the Muslim Brothers and other religious parties.

1.4 The Tribe and the Extended Family

In the social environment in which the SCP was founded and developed, the prevalent form of social organisation was the tribe. The tribal system depended upon the extended family which formed the first building block in the system. The extended family comprised generations of family members living together in the same house or village. This form of social organisation was invested with many functions. First it offered protection to members, economically, socially and also politically. This was particularly important for members of the Sudan Communist Party. Secondly the tribal system, which formed a backbone for the whole of Sudanese society, depended upon these extended families and their role in the economic and political structures. Thirdly due to this form of social organisation Sudan was characterized by a high economic dependency rate. This means that the whole extended family might depend

upon one bread winner. This last feature continued to be the case over time and is still in practice nowadays in the Sudan.

The tribal system had its own social hierarchy. The richest families had a high status. Such families would have their own land and a special workforce of either poorer tribes' families or slaves. The head of the family would own everything and support the rest of the family members. He would divide work, resources and also represent the family in all social, political and religious events and negotiations. The tribal system and extended family played a large role in the political sphere. High status families could mobilize resources to support a particular political standpoint. In times of war, the families would have their men and slaves fight and defend the tribe, tribal territory and the tribal leader to whom every member in the tribe was expected to be loyal. This fact was well known to the elites and political activists and also the negative consequences of coming into conflict with it.

The extended family also had a major role to play in the arrangement of marriages for both young men and women. This affected both women and men in their free choice to establish a family. A family established outside the customs and traditions of the tribe and extended family would be an outcast. Such an outcast family would also be outcast in the wider society. In such society where everyone was proud of his or her tribe and family, social contacts were regulated by tribal and family obedience. Thus when a political party aspired to greater influence, it would attempt to recruit the head of the family, tribe or an influential member of such a tribe. No change in the structure of the tribe or family would be necessary.

Another aspect of this social structure and organisation was the role played by religious men, whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish or of African animist beliefs. In the immediate post-war

years, all these belief systems were found in Sudan and there was no marked discrimination between their followers. As Dr H. Ibrahim Ali has argued, the role of the clergy has deep and lengthy historical roots, “The clergies played a fundamental role in the governing system even before the advent of Islam in Sudan.”¹⁵ It is clear that the religious clergy played a strong role in the culture of Sudan, most specifically the Sufis. Ali gives an explanation for the hegemony of Sufism saying, “Sufism had assimilated in the new belief [meaning Islam] elements of the domestic culture, and transformed them to appear as an original part of Islam. So the citizen maintained many of their non-Islamic customs, traditions, habits, and behaviour.”¹⁶ The early formation of intellectuals – whether religious clergy or school elites has been preserved in oral stories.¹⁷ Sudan depended for long time upon imported cultures which included Islam and as Dr Ali emphasizes: “Sudan was influenced by the ethos of the Islamic era, with a lack of local scientific inheritance.”¹⁸

1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

This research consists of five chapters and a conclusion. In the appendices I include notes on the interviewees. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and outlines the methods used to answer my research questions. It also discusses the different materials I used to reach my goal. I describe how I gathered the oral history information, selected the interviewees and how I conducted these interviews. Chapter 2 tackles the origins, development and culture of the SCP within the context of national political developments in Sudan and the quest for liberation and decolonisation. The chapter treats the different factors that influenced the development of the SCP, including how the SCP manoeuvred to build the trade union movement and other public

¹⁵ Dr Ali, H. Ibrahim, “The Intellectual Formation in Sudan”, Sudanese Studies Centre, Political Culture Series No. 1, Cairo 2001, p. 43.

¹⁶ Dr Ali, op. cit. pp. 45-46.

¹⁷ Most of these were stories, but lately have come to include in some video tapes and television programmes such, “Asma’a fi Hayatina” [Names in our Life], by Omar Gozalli.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 70.

organisations as cornerstones in its struggle to establish working class authority and representation.

Chapter 3 is titled “The Sudanese Communist Party: Organisational Structure and Development of Its Cadres”. The chapter looks at the development of SCP cadres and how they function. Further, the chapter analyses the party hierarchy, how the different units function and the role of the cadres in this process. It also tries to answer the question of why the party worked underground most of the time. To understand the SCP’s methods and functions, the research studies the party’s goals and its application of Soviet-influenced democratic centralism, which in part dictated the structure and function of many of the different units, which were directed from above rather than below.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the underground world of the SCP. The chapter draws heavily on oral stories told by cadres who worked underground. Further the chapter classifies the underground apparatus of the SCP according to different levels in order to make it understandable to readers. The chapter further delineates the qualifications and the training of the underground cadres that they received before they joined this apparatus and describes examples from the daily lives of cadres and how they handled different situations.

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between the SCP and Islam. This has been a very sensitive question since the inception of the party, and Islamism is still a great threat to its existence. The chapter studies the early years of the party with a focus on the theme of religion and how the leaders of the SCP tried to answer pressing questions about their beliefs, religion and atheistic Marxism. The chapter also goes further to study the decline of the SCP

after 1971 and its development into the present. I argue that the issue of religion continues to pose a great intellectual and security threat to the viability of the SCP.

Chapter 6, the conclusion to the thesis brings together the various threads of an answer to the question of how in difficult times the party's leaders used their meagre resources to continue functioning efficiently. The chapter also briefly considers the problems faced by the party today and the question of whether, given its structure and practice, the SCP has any chance of success in the future.

1.6 Methodology

The goal of this research is to document, explore and explain the phenomenon of the SCP in a poor African Muslim society. Actually Islam is until this day is the predominant religion, with more 70% of the population as followers.¹⁹ Drawing on available written materials and oral history interviews, the research describes the origins and nature of the SCP, its structures and underground activities and simultaneously attempts to explain why these took the form they did. Crucial here are the very different conditions under which the party developed when compared with Western communist parties. Particularly important is its relationship to Islam. With each of these aspects of the research project: documenting, exploring and explaining, I applied a combination of methods to answer my research questions. These included:

1. In-depth semi-structured oral life history interviews;
2. Narrative analysis;
3. Observation of leaders;
4. Analysis of internal documents;

¹⁹ See, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudan/Religion>. Accessed on 21/11/2020.

5. Analysis of documents written by the authorities about SCP;
6. Analysis of other articles and material written about the SCP.

In general, my research is concerned with the questions: why the SCP as a social and political phenomenon came into being? When and how this happened? What were the forces that brought it into existence and shaped its development? This requires my addressing the economic and social base for political parties during the colonial era and the role of the colonial authority and the British Communist Party in shaping the form that the party took. It also requires taking account of the role of the legacies of the Communist International (Comintern) which was dissolved in 1943, the importance of the Politburo of the Soviet CP and the Central Committee's Department for Foreign Relations after 1943, and the Eastern Bloc more generally in shaping and supporting the party until the end of the Cold War. The other significant factors are, of course, the underdeveloped nature of the country, the dominance of traditional structures and practices in the Sudan, the lack of educational opportunities and the mostly rural basis of the economy. While this gradually shifted under the colonial administration, the geographically patchy effects of modernisation were an important factor in the development of the party. Yet perhaps most critical of all in shaping the nature of socialism in the Sudan was its relation to Islam.

In the course of my research I read published journalistic and research articles on the history of the SCP and reference books on Sudanese history. The main written source materials that I draw upon include internal Sudanese Communist Party publications, such as *al-Shuyui*, (The Communist), the internal theoretical and organizational publication of the SCP; *al-Munazzim*, an internal publication on organizational issues; proceedings of the meetings of the Communist Party of the Sudan; proceedings of the meetings of the Central Committee of the

SCP; *Almarxia wa Gadai Althorah Alsoudanih* (Marxism & the Issues of Sudanese Revolution); the text of the General Report passed at the SCP Fourth Conference, in October 1967, a *Dar Azah* publication that was published and distributed in Khartoum in 2008. Further original source materials are listed in footnotes and the bibliography.

Available academic scholarship is scant both in Sudan and the West. I was able to find a limited number texts related to my topic, for example Gabriel Warburg & Gabriel R. Warburg's *Islam, Nationalism and Communism in a Traditional Society: The Case of Sudan*, 1978 and *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya*, 2003; Alamin, M. Nouri's 1982 Masters' dissertation on the "Appearance & Development of the Communist Movement 1930-1940" published in 1997; an article in the *Journal of Middle East Studies* on "The Role of the Egyptian Communists in Introducing the Sudanese to Communism in the 1940s" published in 1987; and M. Said Gadal's the *Ma'lim fi Tarikh Al-hizib al-Shuyui 46-96* (Landmarks in the History of the Sudanese Communist Party), published in 1999.²⁰ One useful earlier publication was Walter Z. Laqueur's *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*, published by Frederick A. Praeger, New York in 1956. The more recent collection edited by Elzailaee mentioned above was also relevant.²¹ In the absence of more substantial written sources, my research focuses in detail on the work of the cadres as described in oral history interviews. It is mostly material from these interviews that serves as a basis for examining the underlying factors that led people to embrace communism, and for asking what motivated certain actions or decisions. Other written research has not tackled

²⁰ See: Gabriel Warburg & Gabriel R Warburg, *Islam, Nationalism And Communism In A Traditional Society: Case of Sudan*, 1978. Alamin, M. Nouri. *Zihaar wa tatawor Al-harakah Al-Shuyia Al-Soudania 1930-1940* (The Appearance & Development of Communist Movement 1930-1940), 1997, (M. Sc.). Mohammed Nouri El-Amin, "The Role of the Egyptian Communists in Introducing the Sudanese to Communism in the 1940s" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19, 187, pp 433-454. Gadal, M. Said. *Ma'lim fi Tarikh Al-hizib al-Shuyui 46-96* (Landmarks in the History of the Sudanese Communist Party), Dar Alfarabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 1999.

²¹ See note 10.

such questions. For example, Nouri's Masters' dissertation focused solely on the rise and development of the communist movement. Other written studies of aspects of the SCP to date have tended to focus on its policies, strategies and tactics within limited periods of time. For example Gadai tackles the overall development of the party and the circumstance that led to its establishment, while Nouri also focuses on the rise of the party and its early period.

My research attempts to analyse the party as a whole from the 1940s to the present, and to cover aspects never written about before including its internal structures, decision-making processes, and the functions of different units and sections. To achieve this end I have worked closely with many of those involved in the party at some stage in their lives. Answers to the question of the internal structure of the party over the years can only be accessed by analysing, comparing and contrasting the life stories of leading members alongside available policy documents. The SCP has always surrounded its cadres with secrecy. While my focus is on structures and practice, it is also on historical actors and how they saw things and experienced feelings of collective forms of belonging.

Since I aspire to understand, interpret and explore the world of the SCP, my research is more empirical than theoretical.²² Where possible, I also compare the SCP to other similar Communist Parties experiences in Egypt and Iraq while recognising that the SCP experience was and is in many ways unique. With the purpose of the research in mind, I strived for coherence between the research questions and methods to help generate valid and reliable data.²³ My research questions were straightforward and focused they had to be researched by collecting oral history and archive data. Therefore the questions were relevant and contribute

²² Richie, J., et al. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, Sage Publications, 2003. p. 25.

²³ Ibid. p. 46.

to filling a gap in existing knowledge in the area. Furthermore, taking into consideration my interest and limited resources, they were feasible. It was not, for example, possible for me to consult archives in the former Soviet Union beyond what is digitally available on-line, and subject to my language skills. While more extensive research in Russia might have thrown more detailed light upon the relations between Sudanese communism and the Eastern Bloc, in particular the Soviet Union, this is not the main focus of my thesis. I hope that this thesis will help open up this broader field of scholarship to others.

The research also focuses on the socio-cultural frames of reference within which the cadres tell their stories. In practice these combine aspects of Marxism with Sudanese culture, traditions and customs. The SCP might better be described as developing a Sudanese Marxist approach, in which the Marxist approach available in Soviet influenced models is adapted to Sudanese circumstances. Further, my research was flexible in its design and thus was able to include many questions that arose in the course of the in-depth interviews or in the available documents and narrative analysis. In answering the research questions, I was able to draw on the volume and richness of the data generated through the exclusive interviews with activists and former activists. Because I am well-connected with a wide range of Communist Party members and former members, I was also able to negotiate privileged access to some special internal documents dealing with internal intellectual disputes which are not yet publically available. This range of source materials necessitated the use of a range of approaches to analysing and interpreting this data, with particular emphasis on crosschecking between interviewees and party documents and reading internal sources against any published material.

As mentioned above, the research depends on using in depth interviews with a very specific demographic population. These are a group of twenty-six communist leaders and activists. Of these leaders 18 have had a seat in the Central Committee, three are journalists, four are women cadres, of whom three were members of the Central Committee, one of them was President of the Sudanese Women Association. Also two of them were trade unionist cadres. They were born between 1925 and 1948 and came from different regions of Sudan. While in some cases they originated from and lived for various periods in different parts of Sudan, most of their lives were spent in Khartoum. I selected these people for interview because they are historically significant cadre of the SCP. Some of them are the founding members who came together in 1946. A critical comparative analysis of their narratives, wording and explanations offers the most productive way in which to understand their decisions and the circumstances under which they lived. The interviews combined structure and flexibility. Although I had a topic guide, I was open to covering any relevant topics that arose in the course of the interview by the interviewee.²⁴ In addition, the interviews were interactive because most of them have long experience and worked in wide and varied fields in the SCP , allowing me to probe further to get fuller and deeper answers to my questions. Interviewees participated in giving details and fill gaps.

However, as described above, this research also draws on what has been written on and about the SCP. In contrast to the interviewees, the standpoints of the few available written texts are almost always anti-communist. In orientation I found many articles and few books in Arabic and these are listed in the bibliography. These texts mostly reject the legitimacy of the existence and politics of the SCP. Most of the SCP's enemies depended on this type of political rhetoric or verbal denunciation of the SCP's activities and of the behaviour of its

²⁴ Richie. Op. cit., p. 141.

members. A good example of this is material about the event that led to the banning of the SCP and the expulsion of the SCP parliamentary members in 1965. This material includes themes that were extensively covered in the newspapers archives of 1965. Coverage of this incident shows, without any doubt, how anti-communists used rumours, speeches and other available unwritten media (TV and radio) to fight and stop the development and spread of communism in the Sudan. The dominance of oral culture in Sudan at this time also accounts for the relative paucity of written texts. Where written texts are concerned, my study depends on information published by the SCP, especially its internal documents. I wish to acknowledge the contributions of the many writers, whom I have read and consulted before beginning this research project.²⁵ At the time of writing many of these references that date from my time in the Sudan are neither available nor are they likely to be found in the foreseeable future. They are casualties of the suppression of the Communist Party in Sudan and of my becoming a political refugee. Other material was left with a friend with whom I subsequently lost contact. In travelling from one country to another, I lost a lot of valuable written resources.

For this research, I conducted a document search. Contemporary documents were reviewed and analysed. In each of the following chapters, I refer to those documents that concern the issue or issues treated. In some chapters I depended entirely upon documents and their analysis. In others I utilized documents and interviews. I describe in more detail in Chapter 2 how political culture in its Western sense began to develop in the Sudan with the struggle for independence, particularly after the spread of schools, when educated Sudanese clerks began to emerge, trained to fill the lower ranks of the colonial civil service.²⁶ They formed a distinctive stratum and with the expansion of the capitalist mode of production, a small

²⁵ The history of the SCP was interest of mine even before I became a political refugee in Holland in 1997.

²⁶ Dr. Riad Zahir, "Contemporary Sudan Since its Egyptian Conquest until Independence 1821 – 1953", The Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, 1966, p. 223.

capitalist class also emerged. Political activities began in 'literary clubs' and from there they developed into political organizations. Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) founding members were members of such clubs. This part of the story is to some extent documented in printed materials. I have made use of this material and compared it with the data provided in the interviews as well as what has been written by other scholars. I have also critically evaluated the documents that I obtained for this research. First I investigated their authenticity, physical characteristic, context and content. Then I read and analysed them critically in order to be able to compare and contrast such documents with material from my interviews and secondary sources.

The in-depth interviews with the leaders and rank and file of SCP are central to the thesis and arguably mark a breakthrough in the resources available for writing the recent history of Sudan. In addition to my interviews with the founding fathers and the generations who accompanied them, I also interviewed some of the younger cadres. The SCP cadres did not and do not normally tell their lived experiences to anyone outside the party and its circle. Some cadres who left the party wrote about their experience many years after they were no longer members of the party. Their stories largely confirm recent accounts of lived experience in the party that the researcher was able to obtain from currently active, or recently active members. I was able to check these against one another and establish the legitimacy of accounts of events and incidents told previously. The lived experiences of the leaders and cadres as described in their oral history interviews have formed the main basis from which to tell the story of the SCP. The interviews, when combined with the available written sources, offer insights into the history, organisation and culture of the SCP, as well as complementing existing resources. Under the frequent dictatorial regimes in Sudan, political oppression has consistently forced SCP leaders to live underground. Thus it was only possible to conduct

these interviews when those leaders were publicly available, which meant in a democratic setting such as during the 1986 -1989 democratic regime or when they were in Sudan, in exile in Cairo or London.

1.7 Oral History and the SCP

Scholars tend to use oral history in their research for the purpose of obtaining evidence of the past not available in written records. It is an interview-based method “that works with people’s memory and the manner in which people recount their lived experiences. It is a method that constructs historical narratives which recount the ways in which individual lives intersected with historical events”.²⁷ The SCP, as an underground, often suspected and persecuted political organisation, has found little space in the official historical records of Sudan. However, party members possess a knowledge of the history of struggle and survival and the uneven history of this struggle that has until now largely remained buried among the memories of the members of the movement. I turned to oral history interviews in order to bring out and make accessible this rich source of information and experience.²⁸

As defined by the East Midland Oral History Archive, oral history is:

the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information, based on the personal experiences and opinions of the speaker. It may take the form of eye-witness evidence about the past, but can include folklore, myths, songs and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth.²⁹

²⁷ Sequeira S., "Memory, History Identity: Narratives of Partition, Migration and Settlement among South Asian Communities of South Asia", Cardiff University, Ph. D. Dissertation, 2015, p. 62.

²⁸ I started collecting information in 1988, prior to beginning this doctoral research.

²⁹ East Midlands Oral History Archive, Information Sheet 1# “What is Oral History”, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester.

This makes it particularly appropriate in a largely oral culture such as Sudan, a point that I return to below. Paul Thompson has pointed out that “All History...has a purpose”³⁰. Thompson argues that, “Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people”.³¹ In order to make sense of what has happened in and to the SCP since its founding and to interpret oral history material in a rigorous and convincing way, I have analysed the interviews carefully and read them both against each other and available written materials. As explained above, due to the scarcity of written materials available and the difficulties involved in obtaining access to SCP written documents, I opted to conduct interviews as my main research tool. I wanted by these interviews to complement and extend the existing documentary sources. I lent special emphasis to interviewing the founding fathers of the SCP, or those who had had the direct experience of them and contact with them. The selection process was not difficult since the available leaders were cooperative, though some were initially reluctant. This last group were humble and were convinced that some of their activities, which were considered by others as heroic, were of little consequence. By conducting interviews with eye-witnesses, people who participated in certain past events, I was able to gather rich information that can help in reconstructing and making sense of certain standpoints taken by the SCP.

Another factor that influenced my option to depend on oral history interviews is the fact that Sudanese culture, until recently, depended almost entirely upon oral traditions in recording the histories of groups, families, persons etc. Written material is thus scant. Until the 1970s, oral culture and traditions were dominant in Sudan as in most African societies. Traditional

³⁰ Thompson, P. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Chapter II, second edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 25.

³¹ Thompson, P. 2003, “Voice of the Past: Oral History” in: Perks, R. and Thompson, A. eds. *The Oral History Reader*, London and New York: Routledge. p. 28.

oral forms included storytelling, poetry, family histories, personal narratives, resistance stories and travel narratives. Poets, storytellers and the like thus assumed a prominent position in the social structure. Writing and reading were not widespread under colonialism and literacy rates only rose slowly subsequently. In recent years literacy has even decreased and sources suggest that in Sudan the adult literacy rate was 58.6 % in 2015, down by 4.47 % from 2000.³² That was mainly due to the overall harsh economic conditions, privatization of education and health systems and the rising costs for families to send members to schools. Most of the active social and political agents depended, and still depend, on oral communication with the population by radio and television. At the turn of the twentieth century, most of the Sudanese population had no formal education and writing and reading were a privilege for certain groups: the Quran school teachers and students and some of the state's administrators.

My research questions and my primary contact with my target group, the founding fathers and the younger generation who accompanied them, shaped my interview design. In contacting my interviewees, I sent them questions and agreed with them that I could ask more questions when we began interviewing. After conducting interviews, I transcribed and analysed the interviews. Although interviewees offer a personal interpretation of history, the interviewees also document, in their stories, aspects of the wider historical experience, and their life stories offer information and insight, which is often missing in written sources and thus has been 'hidden from history'.³³ Gyanendra Pandey (2012)³⁴ tries to explain how despite the staunch argument from traditional historians that there can be no history without the archive, the very

³² See, for example, <https://knoema.com/atlas/Sudan/topics/Education/Literacy/Adult-literacy> last accessed 12/4/18.

³³ R.J. Grele. "Directions for oral history in the United States", in D.K. Dunaway and W. K. Baum (eds.), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 1996, p. 63. See also R. Perks, et al (editors), *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London, 1998.

³⁴ G. Pandey, "Un-archived Histories: The 'mad' and the 'Trifling'". *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 12, 2012), pp. 38-41.

archiving process is itself flawed and lacks reference to ordinary people's lives. Hence, in order to do justice to those forgotten by history one needs to rely on memory narratives of people and communities. This precisely is the case with the SCP. The process of recording their voices helped the leaders of the SCP clarify many points, events, and anecdotes for the new generations of SCP members as well as the general public and historians. Their testimonies offer real insights into the everyday world of the party.

My interview questions were open ended and I gave the interviewees the opportunity to elaborate further. In each interview I posed extra questions to draw out aspects of the answers of the interviewee. There were variations in questions, making the interviews more interesting. Some focus more on political issues and episodes, others on personal relations and matters, or interesting subjects such as religion, or culture. Some questions touched on the sensitive aspects of the SCP such as its security, its relationship with different regimes and those members who deserted it. The variation in questions gave a more vivid impulse to the memories and helped the interviewee to focus on answers. I avoided leading questions. The interviews were all recorded on tape. Some of the interviews were conducted in Arabic, and some in English, because the target group were mostly Arabic speakers. After collecting the recorded interviews, I transcribed them, coded them and organised the interviews according to subject matter.

In analysing the interviews I gained the feeling that the interviewees were confident, showed trust and were open in discussing and answering even the most embarrassing questions.

Although the interviews were conducted with different cadres of varying ages, their replies were largely consistent. Even those who left or deserted the SCP did not seem to manipulate their answers. Usually and as is to be expected given their cultural background and training, all the cadres considered their sacrifices to be normal. This is consistent both with party

ideology and with dominant Sudanese cultural values. In Sudanese society, the individual always comes after the community or family and in the Communist Party's members' narratives, the party comes first and the cadre second, even at the level of personal and intimate relationships. From my analysis I discerned that all interviewees showed a general sense of consistency in their response to questions concerning events and subjects. The main concerns of the interviewees were the security of the SCP and its cadres. On this point they laid great emphasis. This can be explained by the oppressive nature of dictatorial regimes.

In their response to the questions that I posed, interviewees positively interacted with me as interviewer. The interviewees had vivid memories and narrated in detail their life experiences, decisions taken and events that they had been part of. This helped me to compare and check individual stories against each other and other sources. These points show the stronger aspects of oral history. However oral history, like other research methods, has its weaknesses. One of these is subjective interpretation of certain aspects of SCP activities or standpoints. Such shortcomings cannot easily be remedied where there is no other information source to depend on. Another weakness is that **I cannot generalize from these interviews**. All those interviewed were loyal to the SCP and I have had no opportunity to interview those who lived through the same experience as my interviewees, but were seen as having deserted the SCP. Most of the deserting members refused to disclose any information or agree to be interviewed. Some of them have however published their own memories, which I also draw upon in this thesis.

The interviews were carried out in different locations in and outside Sudan. All the interviewees knew the interviewer personally, but the interviewer remained as objective as possible since most of the topics were not personal. Also there existed a sense of trust undistorted by the influence of power relationships. All interviewees enjoyed acute recalling capabilities and detailed memories of how they were engaged in intellectual debates, critical

journalistic writing or ‘normal’ professional party politics, with all the discussions, negotiations etc. that these entailed. Throughout the interviews, the interviewees showed a strong interest in the topics raised as well as key events and experiences. While close relationships with interviewees allowed for frank interviews, they did not affect the process of this research beyond the interview stage. Additional interviews carried out by other journalists or researchers and published in newspapers or books were also drawn upon and are referred to in the specific chapters. The use of other sources is acknowledged throughout.

The methods used and the data generated are strong positive aspects of this research. However, in conducting this research I confronted many difficulties, such as planning the logs of interviews and getting in touch with interviewees, mostly during dictatorial regimes. However, the majority of the group I interviewed, fortunately, had open minds and detailed memories. I discerned that the interviewees saw their overall experience as something personal. Their physical and emotional sacrifices were considered a normal thing. While most people who know about it consider their experience as heroic and sacrificing, they do not.

I have agreed with the interviewees to keep some answers anonymous. In particular some questions related to sensitive issues. I have used pseudonyms in this thesis for those interviewees who requested this, while others allowed their full names to be used. This mainly depended upon the vulnerability of their position within the SCP.

1.8 Methods by Chapter

Each chapter uses appropriate methods for the specific topics under discussion while taking account of available resources. In some chapters, I used mainly oral histories. In others I combined oral history with other methods of research. Chapter 2 is devoted to the historical

development of the SCP, so here I have used both secondary and primary sources. I reviewed what was written about the SCP, the archival material of the colonial administration and what other scholars had written about its early development. I also looked at the SCP documents on and from this period. Furthermore, I interviewed many of the party's leaders. Available published written documents by ex-SCP leaders were also utilized. This relative wealth of sources gave me the chance to dig deeply into the early development of this organisation. Chapter 3 is concerned with the SCP's organisational structure and the development of its cadres, so it depends mainly on documents from the SCP itself and secondary sources. Furthermore, I took into account what has been written about communism in Egypt and Iraq, as countries with Islam as dominant religion, with comparable communist movements.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the underground world of the SCP. Here I relied on oral histories, life stories and primary sources such as SCP's documents. Secondary sources were also used and analysed where available. Chapter 5 addresses the relationship between the SCP and Islam. In this chapter I draw heavily on interviews, written secondary sources, discussion and analysis of content and life stories of the leaders, cadres and opponents. Thus the chapter used both primary and secondary sources, oral histories and content analysis.

Chapter 2

The Sudanese Communist Party: Origin, Culture and Development

This chapter focuses on the origins of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) and its development over the years since 1946. It also looks closely at its structure and internal culture, which are the main forces that hold the membership together. The chapter outlines relevant earlier developments of the Sudanese state, economy and its workforce upon which the SCP based its whole trajectory. The chapter attempts to fuse history from ‘above’ (the role of leading figures with reference to the Soviet Union and the import of Marxism-Leninism) and history from ‘below’ (the party’s socioeconomic basis) as well as cultural issues, notably the specific context of Islam and the party’s need to accept religion as an indelible feature of Sudanese society. A note on the places and persons central to the chapter can be found in Appendix 1.

The chapter offers a comparison between the SCP and some aspects of European and Arab Communist Parties, noting here that Sudan’s labour market and state developed slowly over the 20th century beginning after the British colonisation of the country in 1898. It should be noted that the labour market in Sudan depended upon freed serfs and most of the population were small farmers, herders and traders. For these reasons the SCP experience was in many ways very different from communist parties in the West. However, the SCP was similar in some ways to other Middle Eastern communist parties founded earlier such as in [Egypt 1921](#) and in [Iraq 1934](#).³⁵ In all cases communists were exposed to pervasive suppression,

³⁵ The cases of Turkey and Iran, for example, are much less relevant since the party in both countries dates back to the time of empire and the political environment was more open to new ideas. Further, both countries faced different kinds of regimes. The SCP was established in the context of the struggle of National Liberation movements.

persecutions from military and dictatorial regimes and they were working from within Muslim cultures. However, as discussed below, the SCP differed from these communist parties in the ways in which it tackled certain issues such as religion, the emancipation of women and the building of coalitions.

The chapter is divided into sections. The first seven sections can be considered as informative, written in a narrative style using both written sources and interviews. They attempt to draw a holistic picture, portraying the SCP in an underdeveloped environment. The aim is to accompany the reader on the journey of this important, albeit small, political party from the date of its inception to the latest suppressive measures taken against its leadership in January 2018. In section eight I begin a comparison with other Communist Parties, including both Arab and European examples. Sections eight to eleven offer an analytic perspective on the stories that frame the chapter so far.

2.1. Introduction

As will be discussed in detail in this chapter, it was economic and social changes in Sudanese society after conquest by the British, combined with a related growth in national consciousness that paved the way for increased social and political awareness in Sudan. This raised awareness was central to recruiting some sections of the population into the realm of political activities. At the outset of the 20th century, the Colonial Administration began massive investment programmes in education, agriculture and public infrastructure. Its aims were to exploit the economic potentialities of the country, supply British industry with raw materials, provide armies with sorghum, establish a firm rule and administer a vast and diverse country.³⁶ The Administration sought to create an educated, indigenous group as a

³⁶ For English language histories of Sudan see Chapter 1 note 3.

link between itself and the population. To create this group, the Administration established an elementary school in 1900. The school was intended to supply the Administration with clerks.³⁷ Gradually more educational institutions were established: Gordon College in 1903, a Secondary School in 1905, a Survey School in 1907 and an Irrigation Employees School in 1909.³⁸ According to Riad, the total number of Sudanese and Egyptian pupils in Sudanese schools reached 1,533 in 1905.³⁹ By 1918 the total number of schools reached 73, where 6,087 pupils were enrolled.⁴⁰ These schools brought deep changes to Sudanese tribal society. From these schools, emerged the first group of formally educated Sudanese, who began to spread all over the country as employees of the Colonial Administration. Gradually they brought knowledge and social and political change to the rest of society.⁴¹

After the establishment of the Sudan Railways networks and the Sudan Gezira Scheme⁴² in 1925, small-scale processing industries and trade activities began to spread and expand in the Northern part of Sudan and later trade networks extended over the whole country. Trade activities reached all parts of Sudan except for the South where it was prohibited by law.⁴³ The South was considered a closed area, and the law prohibited traders from contacting the

³⁷ Riad Zahir, "Alsoudan Almu-aasir munz AlFatah Almisri wa hata Alistiglal 1821-1953" (Contemporary Sudan from the Egyptian Invasion to Independence 1821 -1953), The Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, 1966, p. 233. (in Arabic).

³⁸ ibid, p.224.

³⁹ ibid, p.223.

⁴⁰ Hayder Ibrahim Ali, "Almugtama Almedani wa almugtama Altagliedi fi Alsoudan"(The Civil Society and the Traditional Society in Sudan), Political Culture, Concepts and Issues, No. 2, p. 81. (in Arabic) 2001.

⁴¹ It should be noted that formal education in state schools was very different from education in Quranic schools, run by sheikhs and Imams. In schools they learned reading and writing English, arithmetic, geography, and some crafts. In Quranic schools they learned how to recite The Quran, Hadith, some arithmetic and how to cultivate land.

⁴² The Gezira Scheme was one of the big irrigated agricultural enterprises established in central Sudan between the Blue and White Nile and south of Khartoum. It was a partnership between the farmers, government and the Sudan Gezira Board (the Management Company). The total irrigated area was 8.800 square kilometres and the network of canals and ditches is 4300 kilometres long. The project produced cotton as the main cash crop and Sorghum (dura) and vegetables alongside the rearing of some household animals for farmers' consumption and the local market. For more information see: Herve Plusquellec, "The Gezira Irrigation Scheme in Sudan :Objectives, Design, and Performance", The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/THE WORLD BANK, Technical Papers No. 120, 1990.

⁴³ The Colonial Administration separated the South from the North by issuing the Closed Areas Ordinance which prohibited any contact with southerners. Due to this, no investment or trade was possible.

Southerners. Industrial activities were largely confined to central Sudan. Trade and export agriculture flourished, due to the rising demand for raw materials from Lancashire-based industries and the armies on different fronts such as [Libya and East Sudan](#). The standard of living improved and trade flourished especially imports. According to Riad Zahir, the value of imports rose from £1,750.000 in 1917 to £7,000.000 in 1924, while the trade deficit declined from one million pounds in 1917 to quarter of a million in 1924.⁴⁴ The increase in imports indicated a rise in standards of living. Most of the imports consisted of coffee, tea, sugar, cotton fabrics, petroleum, wheat flour and coal, while exports consisted of sesame, cattle, sheep and grain.⁴⁵

The railways and the Gezira Scheme provided the backbone for the activities of the SCP. In the railways the SCP established its first relationship with the [manual workers](#) and from there the first trade union movement began which was closely affiliated to the SCP. In the Gezira Scheme, the SCP began its activities among [illiterate](#) peasants, and in a short period built a very strong base. This was mainly due to the fact that SCP cadres were able to live among the peasants and to give them answers to their questions. Furthermore, the SCP's cadres did not tackle sensitive issues such as religion or social customs, aiming instead to root socialism alongside more traditional values and beliefs.⁴⁶

At the turn of the 20th century most of the population were peasants, herders and small traders. After independence in 1956, the labour force began to change gradually; however, agriculture remained the dominant sector, providing employment opportunities. After independence, consecutive regimes began to direct efforts into the processing industries. The Sudanese economy has grown rapidly since then, especially in agriculture, processing and in the service

⁴⁴ Riad Zahir, Op. cit., p. 224.

⁴⁵ M. W. Daly, "Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1898-1934", Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 226 -235.

⁴⁶ The question of the party's relationship to religion is analysed in detail in Chapter 5.

sectors. Industrial activities had tended to be confined to edible oil, soap, water bottling and later cement manufacturing, in addition, to the cotton ginning factories established to prepare cotton and sugar for export. The industrial sector was concentrated in Khartoum and central Sudan, bypassing the rural areas. This industrial sector was totally dependent on imported machinery.⁴⁷ The agricultural sector, including modern and traditional sub-sectors employed more than 68% of the economically active population. The industrial sector has not exceeded 7% in the past fifty years. The agricultural sector contributed 45% of the GDP, while the industrial contribution did not exceed 5%. The service sector contributed 25% of the GDP and at first it was under the sole monopoly of foreign banks and companies and remained so until 1970 when it was nationalized. From the mid-1970s, the agricultural sector's contribution to the economy declined steadily and the service sector has taken the lead. The service sector is the area where new businessmen and activities have flourished and building construction and factory work have encouraged traditional peasants to enter the labour market as wage labourers and to engage in the market economy.

As early as the 1910s, villagers began to migrate from the countryside to towns such as Atbara, Port Sudan, Khartoum and Medani. This social mobility combined with the educational opportunities opened up increased levels of social awareness among some sections of the population. It took the educated elites, approximately forty years after the defeat of Al-Mahdist State in 1898, to organise in parties. However, revolts and resistance against the Colonial Administration continued. Sporadic protests, led by tribal leaders in different parts of the country were not easy to control. As Lutsky argues:

The British had great difficulty in exercising control over the Sudan. From 1900 until 1927, not a single year passed in the Sudan without an uprising, none of which,

⁴⁷ See M. A. Osman, "Alsoudan wa agd Altanmia Aldaia" (Sudan and the Missed Development Decade), SSC, Cairo, 1993, pp. 15-16.

however, embraced more than separate regions or separate tribes. They were all of a local and isolated character and, accordingly, doomed to failure.⁴⁸

This can be attributed to many factors. Mainly Sudan was a vast area with mixed isolated local communities. These communities communicated with each other through verbal means, mostly through traders and travellers. Secondly, most of the population lived in nomadic clans, of which the educated groups were a small part. There were no newspapers, political rallies etc. Sudan was just beginning to embrace the newly externally imposed Western way of life. However, such sporadic resistance fuelled a kind of a national awareness among educated elites, which was reflected in cultural clubs and later political parties. At the same time, education continued to spread, side by side with the growth in the economy and the labour market, leading to increased social awareness.

The revolution of 1924 was a landmark in the history of the Sudan. The White Flag Society, the leading force in this revolution, was an organised movement that drew on different Sudanese citizens, both civilian and military. It consisted of a group of Sudanese officers, soldiers and groups of civilian employees and workers. After its suppression, including the killing of its leaders in open warfare, the organisation was dismantled and it went underground. A period of political stagnation reigned until 1930, when again the elites began literary clubs, circumventing the Colonial Administration's control and repression. Dissemination of organisational methods, through literature clubs and societies, and later political parties, paved the way for the establishment of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP).

⁴⁸ Vladimir Borisovich Lutsky, "Modern History of the Arab Countries", 1969, (<http://www.marxists.org/subject/arab-world/lutsky/ch19.htm#s6>), accessed on 23-04-2018.

The established educational system played a pivotal role in this process by augmenting the newly created labour market with new graduates. They were dependent upon selling their labour to the government (i.e. the Colonial Administration), and on establishing contacts with foreign cultures. They were influenced by political and cultural activities in neighbouring countries, especially Egypt with which they had special ties.

An elite educated group began to emerge in the modern towns, usually called 'awareness centres' (*marakiz alwaie*). Sudanese towns drew this name from the fact that they enjoyed, at the time, more governmental services such as education, security and transport compared with other areas. This helped in the transfer of knowledge and sources of news such as newspapers, and they also had some contacts with the outside world. Most of the town residents enjoyed some sort of education or training. Towns had workers' and graduates' clubs which also helped in convening lectures, discussion groups etc. The educated elites consisted of groups who attended schools and/or the Gordon Memorial College and were employed by the Colonial Administration in different positions in the state apparatus. According to historical sources, the educated elites began their activities in literary societies and graduate clubs. The first graduate club was established in 1918, with literary activities as its main aim e.g. reading, discussing books, poetry etc. Politics was not part of its agenda.⁴⁹ However, after the revolution of 1924, a new era dawned in Sudan when the educated elites restarted literary clubs, after a short period of closure, as a cover for underground political activities. The thirties witnessed the continued spread of cultural clubs and their claim to represent the people of the Sudan. At the national level, with the outbreak of the Second World War, the Sudanese military supported the Allied forces and fought with them on *different fronts* such

⁴⁹ Mohamed Omer Beshir, "Tariekh Alharak Alwataniah fi Alsoudan 1900-1969" (A History of the Nationalist Movement in Sudan 1900-1969), Aldar Alsoudaniyah, 1991 (in Arabic), translated by H. Riyad et al., pp. 201-217. See also: Nowar Gaffer, "The Graduates' National Movement in Sudan 1918 - 1944", in Jurnal Setarah, publication details unknown.

as in Libya and Ethiopia. That exposed many Sudanese soldiers and officers to contacts with Western cultures and ideas, in particular ideas calling for political independence and national freedom. When these soldiers returned to Sudan they began to discuss ideas such as nationalism, socialism, independence etc. with their fellow citizens.⁵⁰

2.2 Precursors of the SCP

Most of the oral accounts of the origin of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) confirm that it was initially established in the mid-1940s as HASITO, though accounts vary in details. Some stress the role of the early cells that were established in the beginning of 1940 by a young British Communist officer, Herbert Story, who was attached to the British Army in Sudan.⁵¹ Others emphasise the role of Sudanese students in Egypt who began their activities in Cairo and later transferred these to Sudan.⁵² Still other accounts tell us that a group of British teachers played a central role in recruiting Sudanese students to communism and later to the establishing of the SCP.⁵³ The degree to which the British Communist Party was involved in the spread of Marxism and communist principles in Sudan and in establishment of the SCP through its members' following post-Comintern directives remains unclear. The CPGB archives in Manchester throw little light on this question.⁵⁴ One of my interviewees, Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman, a prominent ex-communist and one of the founders of the SCP tells a somewhat different story, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵⁰ M. Said, "Gadal, Maalim fi Tarikh Al-hizib al-Shuyui 46-96", (Landmarks in the History of the Sudanese Communist Party), Dar Alfarabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 1999, pp. 23-24. See also: Mohamed Omer Beshir, "Tariikh Alharak Alwataniah fi Alsoudan 1900-1969" (History of Nationalist Movement in Sudan 1900-1969, Aldar Alsoudaniyah, 1991 (in Arabic), translated by H. Riyad et al., pp. 243-245.

⁵¹ All the interviewees mentioned Story.

⁵² Declassified British National Intelligence document FO 371/B 471 points to Egypt as the main source of communist propaganda.

⁵³ Declassified British National Intelligence document FO 371/B 471 paragraph VI suggests that Sudanese students who studied in Britain brought communism to the Sudan and that communist ideas also circulated via British Communist publications. Moreover the expatriate British community in Sudan included 'a very few confessed communists'.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 1, note 8.

Historical studies and interviews emphasise that Marxism reached the Sudanese elites through two sources.⁵⁵ The first was the influence of British army officers, soldiers and teachers who came with the colonial army bringing socialist, Fabian and Marxist thought and who were able to contact a group of employees, workers and students.⁵⁶ The second source of influence was the Egyptian influence on Sudanese students who were studying in Egypt and had contacts with different Egyptian political groups, including Marxist and communist groups.⁵⁷ These two sources were enough to encourage a small group to begin in 1946 with the establishment of HASITO. HASITO is an Arabic abbreviation of The Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (*Alharakah Alsoudaniyah Lil Taharor Alwatani*). This was the first name given to the SCP and remained in use until it was changed to Sudanese Communist Party later in 1952.⁵⁸ The establishment of HASITO was a result of the activities of the first groups of Sudanese, especially students, who joined Egyptian communist organisations and other groups under the influence of British communists.⁵⁹ Leaders in the SCP such as A. Mahjoub, Tigani Eltayeb, Abdo Dahab, Zaki Murad and Salah Bushra (who died during detention in Egypt) were examples of people who came from these groups.

⁵⁵ "A Report on Communism in Egypt Middle East" prepared by Hassan Rifat Basha, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, 1948, Cairo. This report was sent confidentially by Mr. R. Campbell to Mr. E. Bevin. Public Archives London, and Foreign Affairs Office 371-53327.

⁵⁶ Sulieman, Op. cit., pp. 118 - 120.

⁵⁷ See Abu Hassabo and also Rif'at, "The History of Leftist Organisations in Egypt 1940-1950", Dar Elthagafa Algadidah, Cairo, Egypt.

⁵⁸ Changing the name of HASITO to the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) is considered by Elzailaee as evidence of adopting the methods and manners of the post-Comintern International Communist Movement. Changing the name was one of the conditions posed by Lenin and adopted by the Comintern in Article 18. "The Relation of the SCP with the ICM and its negative impact", in Siddig Elzailaee, ed., "The Sudanese Left and the Russian Revolution: the Impact of Victory and the Lessons of Collapse" 2018, p. 75.

Article 18 reads: "Parties wishing to join the Communist International must change their name. Any party seeking affiliation must call itself the Communist Party of the country in question (Section of the Third, Communist International). The question of a party's name is not merely a formality, but a matter of major political importance. The Communist International has declared a resolute war on the bourgeois world and all yellow Social-Democratic parties. The difference between the Communist parties and the old and official "Social-Democratic" or "socialist" parties which have betrayed the banner of the working class, must be made absolutely clear to every rank-and-file worker." <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x01.htm>, (accessed 23-09-2018).

⁵⁹ See this in Arabic (translation is by the researcher): http://www.midan.net/?page_id=49. See also, Gabriel Warburg & Gabriel R. Warburg, "Islam, Nationalism And Communism in a Traditional Society: Case of Sudan", 1978, pp. 93-201. According to Warburg and Warburg, a British communist was able to work closely with school students to establish the first cell.

According to Laqueur, an American historian, writing in 1956:

Sudan is a predominantly agrarian country, and the number of industrial workers is negligible; of its eight to nine million inhabitants only 1-2 per cent is believed to be literate. Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of both a numerous working class and a developed native intelligentsia, communism has made much progress in the Sudan during the last ten years and would probably have been even more successful if the leaders of the movement in Khartoum had been allowed by the comintern a modicum of independence in their policy. The absence of permanent splits makes the history of communism in the Sudan easier to follow than in Egypt, and this has probably been the main reason for its spectacular progress.⁶⁰

The lack of independence in policy matters mentioned by Laqueur refers to the influence of the Egyptian connection and is illustrated by the case of Henri Curiel, who was born in Cairo to a Sephardic Italian-Jewish family and became an Egyptian citizen and a communist involved in the anticolonial movement in Egypt in the 1940s. He played a central role in reaching different Sudanese activists until his expulsion from Egypt in 1950.⁶¹ This was made possible via the Sudanese Nubian Abdo Dahab. Through his connection with Abdo Dahab, Henri Curiel contacted Nubians such as Zaki Murad, Mubarak Abdo Fadl, Mohamed Khalil Gasim, Mohamed Amin Hussein, Tigani Eltayeb, Izzeldin Ali Amer and others. The Egyptian Communist Party became concerned and interested in Sudan's affairs due to the fact that a Sudanese Army Officer had been in touch with them asking their opinion on the "Sudanese Question".⁶² The Egyptian Communist Party formed a division devoted to the Nubians, who

⁶⁰ Walter Laqueur, Chapter IV of *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger), 1956, pp. 61-69.

⁶¹ The Almidan Bookshop, well known to Sudanese Students in Egypt at the time, established by Henri Curiel specialised in Marxist books that then found their way into Sudan. See Siddig Elzailae "The Relation of the SCP with the ICM and its negative impact", in Elzailae, 2018, p. 67.

⁶² According Rifat Said, in "The Leftist Organisations 1940-1950", Op. cit. The Officer was Mohamed Najib, the first President of Egypt after the forced abdication of King Farouk in 1952. Najib was member of the Free Officers in the Egyptian Army.

formed a minority group and for security reasons. Through Abdo Dahab and his colleagues they established the Nubian Clubs as an umbrella organisation. Moreover, “After the contact of the Sudanese Officer with the Party asking about the Communist Party’s view of the Sudan Question, the Party decided to consider it to be an international duty to assist in establishing a communist organisation in the Sudan.”⁶³ Abdo Dahab added further, “In 1943 I was commissioned by the Egyptian Communist Party to recruit Sudanese subjects to join the Party.”⁶⁴ Abdo Dahab began his work immediately among the Sudanese students and was successful in this endeavour:

Then later I was also commissioned to travel to the Sudan to contact the group we heard about [meaning Story’s group]. In Khartoum I met a British officer called Story. Story said to me that with all his efforts he could not recruit more than two elements [sic] namely Ahmed Zain Alabdien and Hasan Altahir Zarrouq.⁶⁵

According to Abdo Dahab many people joined this effort and began underground activities. It seems that underground activities were the only option open for the new communist group. As mentioned earlier, the colonial regime since the 1924 revolution had had the tendency to oppress any political liberation movement.⁶⁶

Dr Gadai, a historian and member of the SCP’s Central Committee, said in his book, “*Ma’ālim fi Tarikh Al-hisb Alshyoi*” (*Landmarks in the History of the Sudanese Communist Party*), that the SCP in particular and other Sudanese Parties in general were affected by several factors that led them to establish their political parties.

⁶³ Rif’at Said op. cit.

⁶⁴ Rif’at Said op. cit.

⁶⁵ Op. cit.

⁶⁶ Declassified British National Intelligence document FO 371/B 471 suggests that the Colonial Authority were following the spread of communist ideas which was taken seriously, even though it was thought that ‘All communism in the Sudan is underground. There is no ‘Sudan Communist Party as such.’ Para VIII, 1952.

1. The international impact of the Second World War: the victory of democracy and the conquering of the authoritarian regime in Nazi Germany; the ascending of the British Labour Party to power in 1945 with its socialist Fabian thought, its social programme and its understanding and sympathies with the aspirations of colonised people; and further, the electoral successes of communist parties in France and Italy.
2. The regional impact of Egypt and the direct contact of students with cultural and political activities in Egypt. Especially important was the effect of Henri Curiel who presented three options to the Egyptian and Sudanese communist movement, namely: offering leadership by the party to the people; selecting a political slogan suitable to each phase in the struggle; and forming political coalitions with other political parties.⁶⁷
3. The subjective factor: this element has been ignored by many scholars including Dr Nouri who argued that the establishment of the SCP was pushed by Henri Curiel for three reasons:
 - a. to oppose and abort the negotiations over the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 (the Sudgi-Beven Treaty)⁶⁸;
 - b. to abort the striving of the British officer Herbert Story whose ambition was to form a Sudanese Communist Party attached to the British Communist Party; and
 - c. to establish a Sudanese Communist Party that would support Egypt in time of need.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Gadai, M. Said, "*Ma'alim fi Tarikh Al-hisb Alshyoi*" (Landmarks in the History of the Sudanese Communist Party), pp. 22-25.

⁶⁸ The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, a military agreement between Britain and Egypt. See: http://i-cias.com/e.o/angl_tr_egyptian.htm

⁶⁹ Dr. Nouri, M. Alamin "*Zihoor wa tatawor Al-harakah Al-Shuyia Al-Soudania 1930-1940*" (The Appearance & Development of Communist Movement 1930-1940), 1997, (M. Sc.).

However, many internal and subjective factors also led to the establishment of the SCP. First, was widespread poverty and social under-development. Secondly, the increase in the number of educated Sudanese people (belonging to the working, white collar and employer classes), with increased social awareness, as a result of Graduate Conference activities was important. Thirdly, the general strike led by the Sudan Defence Force in 1945 after they were dismissed from work without benefits played a role encouraged citizens to express their concern over many national issues. Fourthly, the daring approach of newspapers in tackling and criticising the Colonial Administration and especially senior British civil servants was important. Fifthly, the dominance of a liberal and semi-liberal climate in the Sudan was conducive despite the strong hold of the Colonial Administration.⁷⁰

Many Sudanese students travelled to Egypt for study. The majority were involved in Egyptian political and cultural activities. A sizeable group had joined different Egyptian communist organisations. A. Kamarat tells how they were organised saying: “The first cell I joined consisted of black skinned students: one Sudanese, one Libyan, one Tanzanian, one Egyptian Nubian and myself. We were all black. Our cell was formed from black people to diffuse doubt as the secret police, at the time, were very active against communists.”⁷¹ At the time, the international orientation made it easy for a Zanzibar communist to recruit A. Kamarat and his friends into one cell at the beginning of 1940. Common culture, language, customs and history were factors that made it easy for the Sudanese students to join the Egyptian communist movement. A. Abu Hassabo indicated that the first Sudanese communist cells were established among the Sudanese students through the Nubian groups. *The Nubian groups were the link between Egyptian and Sudanese communists, as their communities*

⁷⁰ See Gadal in *Ma'alim*, op. Cit, pp. 25-26. Also see, A. Mahjoub, “*Lamahat min Tariekh Alhizb Alshyoui*”(Glimpses from the History of the Communist Party), p. 29.

⁷¹ An Interview with Abdul-latif Kamarat.

extend across both the South of Egypt and the North of Sudan. The Sudanese Nubians, such as Abdo Dahab and Zaki Murad, represented the first Sudanese communists.⁷² “We were, Mohammed Ahmed Hussein, Izzeldin Ali Amer, Abdul Wahab Zien Alabidien and myself, the first to join the communist movement in Egypt. From our group the first Sudanese cell was established. This happened in 1945.”⁷³

According to Abu Hassabo, they held weekly meeting with a group of Egyptian youth at Abdo Dahab’s house. The group would discuss various issues including colonialism, the monarchy, the unity of the Nile Valley and the struggle for independence. The meetings had been taking place for some time, when Abdo Dahab, the first Nubian communist, informed them that they were participating in a communist cell. They accepted that and began to recruit others.⁷⁴ While other cells were also formed, this group played a central role in recruiting other Sudanese students to communism. As Abu Hassabo has said: “We were led to communism by Abdo Dahab, who was a supervisor at the Italian Club in Cairo. Abdo Dahab himself had been recruited by Italian communists and he had joined the Egyptian Communist Party.”⁷⁵

Abu Hassabo was the first Sudanese elected to the Egyptian Communist Party’s Central Committee.⁷⁶ Abu Hassabo’s group was very active and they began to publish a magazine called *Omdurman*. According to Abu Hassabo, “The magazine had a pronounced nationalist tone and discussed the Sudanese question extensively.”⁷⁷ Abu Hassabo suggests that the SCP

⁷² Algindi, M. Yousif, “*Alyasar wa Alharahkah Alwatania fi Misr 1940-1950*” (The Left & the National Movement in Egypt 1940-1950), Dar Elthagafa Algadidah, First Edition, 1996.

⁷³ A. Hassabo, “*Muzakirat Abu Hassabo*” (Memoirs of Abu Hassabo), Part One, Dar Sanab Publishing, February 1987.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 101.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 101.

⁷⁶ *ibid.* p. 102.

⁷⁷ *ibid.* pp. 102-105.

was established after a long discussion in Egypt between the Egyptian Communists, Henri Curiel and other European communists.⁷⁸

While Curiel was busy creating a Sudanese communist cadre, a young British man called Herbert Story, stationed in the Sudan as a recruit in the British Army, began to establish the first local Sudanese communist group.⁷⁹ Story's group consisted of workers in Sudan Railways, students and junior employees in the Administration.⁸⁰ Other sources suggest that many European communists, most of them teachers in the Sudan, were involved in disseminating communist ideas. Among those mentioned was Alfred Gobi Dickinson, a secondary school teacher, who had spread communist thought among the students of the high school in Wadi Saidna.⁸¹ Other teachers such as John Antonio Ikit, Walter Hans and Wims Sandon have also been mentioned as sources for the spread of communism in Sudan.⁸² At the time, there were different groups of Sudanese communists in Sudan and in Egypt. The discussion led by Henri Curiel had focused on two options: Herbert Story's view that asserted that the Sudanese communists ought to be part of the British Communist Party and Curiel's view that they ought to be part of the Egyptian movement. However, the group opted for a third way, for the complete independence of the Sudanese communist movement.⁸³ For this reason, Abdo Dahab was commissioned to travel to the Sudan to discuss the matter with Officer Story's group.

⁷⁸ Henri Curiel is considered the godfather of the communist movements in Egypt and Sudan. He established the Democratic Movement for National Liberation, later the Egyptian Communist Party. He was expelled from Egypt in 1950 and lived in Paris until his assassination in 1978. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Curiel

⁷⁹ Abu Hassabo, Op. cit., p. 105.

⁸⁰ Different sources refer to this including Abu Hassabo. Among Story's group was: Ahmed Zain Alabdien, Hassan Abu Jabal, A. Abu Algasim and Abdul Rahiem Ahmed.

⁸¹ Wadi Saidna was the second higher secondary school in the Sudan at the time. The school was famous for its high performance, students' activism and high national awareness.

⁸² Mentions were made in party pamphlets that are no longer accessible or where the ink is too faded.

⁸³ Abu Hassabo, Op. cit., p. 105.

According to Tigani Eltayeb, a prominent communist leader, founding member and one of the first students who joined the Sudanese group in Egypt: “We supported all the Sudanese organisations, at the time, so as to make them a source for the resistance to the colonial power.”⁸⁴ He further stated: “We were a group of seven to ten and met in Almogran Park⁸⁵ and discussed the establishment of the Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (HASITO).”⁸⁶ This was the first name of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP). While Tigani participated in the communist organisations in Egypt, he also, with others, started HASITO. His story here depicts the first and founding meeting of HASITO.

2.3. The Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (HASITO) (SCP’s first name)

The Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (known by its Arabic abbreviation HASITO an acronym) was established in 1946. Some authors considered it to be an offshoot of the Egyptian Communist Movement,⁸⁷ because some of the founding members were then studying in Egyptian universities and members of the Egyptian communist movement. Laqueur indicated that, “The first Communist cells were established among Sudanese students in Cairo in 1944.”⁸⁸ Egyptian historian and communist leader Dr Rifaat Alsaid also supports the importance of Egypt arguing that, “The Egyptian movement helped in establishing the Sudanese Party.”⁸⁹ Yet even before this, Ahmed Sulieman, who was an advocate and prominent founder of SCP and a member of its central committee, points to a long history of prior struggle to bring Marxism to the Sudan. He has said,

⁸⁴ Interview with Tigani Eltayeb.

⁸⁵ Almogran Park: A well known park in Omdurman city where people usually come together at the evening. This Park was existent until 1983, when it was closed after the application of Sharia Laws that prohibited drinking. Tigani did not explain why they made their meeting secret and why they kept their new party top secret.

⁸⁶ Interview with Tigani Eltayeb.

⁸⁷ Walter Laqueur, “Chapter IV of *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*”, (1956) New York: Frederick A. Praeger, p. 61.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Algindi, *The Left & the National Movement in Egypt 1940-1950*, 1996, p. 14.

There is a common mistake we need to rectify. It was commonly held that the Sudanese communist Party was a legitimate son of the Egyptian Communist Movement. Reality refutes this as the first cell established to study Marxism was organised by three Armenians who arrived to the Sudan during 1917-20 specifically: Artien Arkian (a mechanic), Badros Sahortian (a technician in the Sudan Public Works), and Anis Dharbian (a trade commissioner). The three had contacts with an Egyptian communist engineer working between Khartoum and Atbara. They contacted Ali Ahmed Salih⁹⁰, who in turn contacted six of his relatives and formed the first communist cell in the Sudan.⁹¹

However, this cell did not survive long. After the departure of the Armenian activists and the trial in 1924 of Ali Ahmed Salih, who had been accused of being a founding member of the White Flag Society, which led the revolution, the cell was ‘disappeared’. However according to Sulieman, communist cells appeared again at the beginning of 1940s.⁹² Their re-appearance was the crowning of the achievement of Officer Story, and according to Sulieman, Story contacted secondary school students and some of the intellectuals.⁹³ Sulieman recounts how students in this group made trips in the summer holidays and recruited others to the new party.⁹⁴ Sulieman has documented the success of this group in different parts of Sudan, especially their success in establishing the first cell in West Sudan.⁹⁵ While Abdo Dahab’s account in his interview with Rifaat, which was quoted above, contradicts this story, other

⁹⁰ Ali Ahmed Salih was famous for his ability to organise and mobilise.

⁹¹ Ahmed Sulieman, “*Mashinaha Khotah*”(Footsteps we walked), pp. 85-86. The other six were: Mohamed Khier Almardi, Habib Hana, Ibrahim Said Abdo, Almaz Abdallah Saád, Farag Allah Sa'ad and Ibrahim Musa.

⁹² Sulieman. Op. cit., pp. 86-87.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 87-88. The group consisted of: Ahmed Zain Alabdien, Hasan Mohamed Hamid, Altahir Alsarag, Hassan Altahir Zarrouq, Abdel hamid Abu Algasim Hashim, Abdel Gayoom Mohamed Saád, Adam Abo Sininah and Ahmed Mohamed Khier.

⁹⁴ Sulieman. Op., Cit., p. 87.

⁹⁵ ibid.

historians have confirmed the fact that those secondary school students were able to reach West Sudan.

Other prominent founders of the SCP have also provided their stories. Specifically Abbas Ali, Khalidah Zahir, Gizoli Said and Kamil Mahjoub. Those who joined HASITO (SCP) were a group of independent educated elites, who rejected joining the traditional leaders. In this same year, 1946, two cells were established, one at Khartoum University, (known at the time as Gordon Memorial College⁹⁶) and the other in Atbara Town among the Sudan Railways workers.⁹⁷ From the *Communist*, the SCP's internal magazine⁹⁸, it is clear that each of these held a prominent position in the early formations of HASITO. Abbas Ali was commissioned to run the "technical system", which was the name for the publishing division. He was also a responsible cadre for a long period. Gizoli Said was also a prominent cadre and he was commissioned to establish the party's branches in the Eastern Region, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Kamil Mahjoub was the one who, with others, led the activities to organise the Gezira Farmers. During his period of activity there, 1952 to 1959, the SCP established a strong hold in the Gezira Scheme, and the whole of the Blue and White Nile Provinces.

Organising women and girls in a traditional society was a tough task confronting the founding fathers of the SCP. However, the communists were able to recruit some young women. Dr Khalidah Zahir was the first Sudanese woman to enter HASITO, and thus to enter the political

⁹⁶ Declassified British National Intelligence document FO 371/B 471 paragraph IX cites the Gordon Memorial College as the centre of communism in the Sudan "with the Institute of Education, Bakht -er-Ruda, a good second".

⁹⁷ See "The Communist" SCP magazine, where they narrated their stories. No. 150, 152, 153 (1985 -1987)

⁹⁸ "The Communist" was and is the internal magazine for educating the SCP members. It was first published in 1948 with the name "Alcadre" (meaning "The Cadre") and then the name was changed to "The Communist". It is considered the Party's theoretical and ideological publication. Sometime it was irregular due to political and security reasons. Since its first issue and until now it has published 159 issues.

arena in the Sudan. This was in 1946 when she was a medical student and she was also the first girl to enter Gordon College and the first to address and lead a political rally. She became a member of the central committee.

The colonial intelligence reported on the existence of communist activities in 1952.⁹⁹ During the period 1946 to 1950 the SCP worked totally underground. This might reflect the caution of early founders of the SCP and their fear that their activities would be hampered. At the time, the Sudan Intelligence Police benefited from Egyptian Intelligence work, which resulted in the deportation of many Sudanese communist students from Egypt. The Egyptian Intelligence followed left-wing Egyptian and Sudanese students and sometime stormed and searched Sudanese students' houses in Egypt. In these raids the Police found communist publications and documents. The deported students were later involved in politics in the Sudan and supported the Egyptian cause. The Sudan Intelligence Police began to put communist activism under surveillance. Many of those students stood trial and either were fined or sentenced to short periods of imprisonment or both. At this time, and specifically in 1949, the first professional underground cadre began his job in Sudan. Before this date all of those in the underground apparatus were volunteer communists. Many interviewees have produced different stories, but all agree that underground activities were and are an important element in the survival of the SCP.¹⁰⁰ The roles of different cadres and underground work are addressed in Chapters 3 and 4.

HASITO held its second conference ten years later in 1956, the year of Sudanese independence, when the name Sudan Communist Party (SCP), was adopted officially. The

⁹⁹ See the British Intelligence Report No. 171100, dated 2 June 1952. I used the Arabic version translated at this website <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=173&msg=1138912326>

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Muhammad I. Nugud conducted by Diyaá Bilal. Also see the Intelligence Report about the Communists lists.

early founders and leaders of HASITO were aware that they could not reach the vast majority of the population without inventive measures. They learnt from the experiences of others worldwide including the Egyptians and they began to think of establishing organisations that would bring them close to their targeted groups. After establishing the first cells, they were a minority among the large Sudanese political parties, but they could still mobilize thousands of supporters in towns and rural areas. The SCP leaders, with their knowledge of Sudanese society, began to lay emphasis on the norms and values that were highly respected by the Sudanese people such as courage, simplicity, defence of the rights of others, self-sacrifice and generosity, in addition to emphasising the need for a good effective organisation.¹⁰¹ They also directed their activities towards the most effective social gatherings and initiated the transformation of the struggle against colonialism into an open campaign. This will be discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

In a short period, HASITO was very effective. Its effectiveness was due to many factors, the most important six of which I summarize here:

1. HASITO was a highly organised party. Although it had few members, they were efficiently organised into cells, branches, divisions, town-based committees and the general secretariat. Members had regular meetings. Each cell had two meetings per week an organisational meeting and a cultural one. In the former, members would review all their previous tasks since the last meeting, their recruitment activities and what they had accomplished. As such it was an evaluation meeting with an agenda of devising possible new tasks for the future. In the second meeting they would study Marxism, the party programme and regulations. This cultural meeting was very

¹⁰¹ . They were educated, living among the people and knowing the customs and traditions.

important for all members who did not have much knowledge of Marxism or organisational issues.

2. New ways of struggle: the traditional Sudanese political parties confined their activities to the elites, to what is called 'salon politics', and had no regular contact with their supporters. But they depended upon the support of rural areas. These parties would contact their supporters when they needed to mobilise them for a rally. *HASITO* brought to the political scene new forms of political activities unknown to these parties and to the colonial administration. For the first time, a political party had political publications and press releases distributed to the public. Not only that but *HASITO* was able to import a Roneo printing machine.
3. New methods in political activism: *HASITO* invoked new methods to bring its slogans, programmes and messages to the public.¹⁰² The members began to organise demonstrations and strikes. This was new to Sudanese society and by doing that they increased the number of the people, at least in the urban areas, who began to participate in political activities, whether by walking in demonstrations or participating in strikes. Furthermore, *HASITO* members began the innovative method for Sudan of writing slogans and messages on walls, and street pavements.
4. Written material: *HASITO* was very much concerned with the written word and began actively to disseminate written material to the general public. This was also totally new in a society where 90% were illiterate, but not uneducated in the politics of the country. But this opened a venue for the communists to begin classes in the campaign to erase illiteracy.
5. *HASITO* gave attention to the internal education of members because knowledge of Marxist theory and education were seen as weapons in the fight for political liberation.

¹⁰² . Traditional parties had newspapers as means to lay contact with the people.

The leaders of HASITO began to publish an internal magazine for the education of members, *Alcadre*, (The Cadre) which later was renamed “The Communist”. The magazine paid attention to theoretical, organisational and political questions.¹⁰³

6. Direct activities with social groups. The traditional Sudanese parties tended to ignore young people, students, farmers, workers and women. When HASITO began its struggle, it directed its activities into organising these groups in the struggle not only against colonialism, but also for their own liberation and for social, economic, political and civil rights. In this struggle HASITO was a pioneer and succeeded in a short period in establishing many organisations in urban and rural areas. For this reason HASITO, and later the SCP, are considered by many writers and researchers as the strongest Arab and African Communist Party.

The first period, 1946 -1952, was described by many founding members as a very difficult period. This was mainly due to the fact that HASITO’s leadership was changed three times during 1946-1949.¹⁰⁴ According to both members and documents, the changes were imposed by challenges from the colonial administration after establishing the Legislative Assembly in 1948, the impact of the national capitalists on HASITO and the limitation of the party activities within the boundaries imposed by this social class.¹⁰⁵ Official intelligence reports from 1949 show that at first HASITO remained unknown to the intelligence authorities and was only discovered in September 1947 when HASITO distributed circulars in Atbara city, inciting the workers on the Sudan Railways to strike.¹⁰⁶ The intelligence report says:

This party, the members of which are well known to the police, has continued to produce pamphlets from time to time, all of them anti-government, directed against the

¹⁰³ See footnote 3 above.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid* pp. 55-56.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ Civil Secretary Report 133, “Communism in the Sudan”, dated 16th February, 1949.

government's policy or government's action of the moment. In particular, they called upon the people to boycott the Legislative Assembly; to demonstrate against it.¹⁰⁷

Prior to that and due to the underground nature of HASITO, the intelligence authority had not detected it. Even the CIA had no real idea of the nature of HASITO. A CIA report from 1951 says:

There is no legally constituted CP in the Sudan. The Sudanese Movement of National Liberation has Communist tendencies, but it is not considered significant, nor is there evidence that it is in contact with any Soviet diplomatic or consular missions. It is, however, in touch with left-wing elements in Egypt: liaison is apparently maintained through students returning to the Sudan from Egyptian universities. Two persons reported to be active in the group are Ahmed Nadeef and Mohammed Omer Beshir, the first two people to distribute specifically communist leaflet.¹⁰⁸

2.4. The Founding of Public Organisations

At the time when HASITO was officially established in 1946 by a group in Khartoum, a cell in Atbara was also formed and the first workers' organisation began to emerge. Needless to say, HASITO was only able to establish these organisations because there was a real need for them. The socio-economic and political conditions in the Sudan had helped HASITO cadres to come in contact with the vanguards of these social groups. It can be argued that the general conditions in Sudanese society had paved the way for HASITO to build, with the leaders of these groups, organisations that expressed their own needs. These organisations, although led by some communist cadres, had always remained independent from the party.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* The Legislative Assembly was a parliament established by the colonial government in Northern Sudan in December 1948 and it continued until May 1952.

¹⁰⁸ CIA, Intelligence Memorandum No. 346, "Communism in Africa", 24 January 1951, p. 35.

2.5. Organising the Working Class

From its inception the SCP directed attention to organising the working class. The Sudan Railways was the biggest company in Sudan at the time. The number of workers and employees was estimated to be more than 100,000. The number of workers and employees in Atbara, the company headquarters, exceeded 10,000. The workers were firmly committed to organising trade unions after they read a British Ministry of Information booklet on trade unions and industrial relations.¹⁰⁹ In the summer of 1946, “The artisans of the mechanical department of Sudan Railways in Atbara formed a Workers’ Affairs Association.”¹¹⁰ The Workers’ Affairs Association had no political objectives and the emphasis was on its independence from any political party.¹¹¹ As the first nexus of the working class, the SCP leaders began their activities there by sending delegations and professional cadres to organise the workers.

However, the first contacts of the workers with cultural and political issues began even before the establishment of HASITO. Students returning from Egypt to spend holidays at home in the Sudan organised cultural activities for the workers, in which progressive ideas were discussed and the Egyptian experience was reflected upon. Also the British officers and soldiers, who held socialist and communist ideas, began to contact the workers. According to the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR)¹¹² research group, “The first workers organisation was purely devoted to social and economic claims. But shortly the workers became aware that their claims would be countered by the British colonial

¹⁰⁹ International Centre for Trade Union Rights, “Sudan: The Labour Movement & Trade Union Rights”, Prague: International Centre for Trade Union Rights, 1993, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.15.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² The International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR) is an organisation devoted to the defence of trade union rights, established in the Czech Republic by many Left Trade Unionists.

administration.”¹¹³ Further, the ICTUR adds, “The workers’ organisations began as unionist organisations, but shortly the workers discovered that their claims would collide against the British administration.”¹¹⁴ This happened when workers’ demanded recognition from the management. This struggle to gain recognition of the Workers’ Affairs Association continued from 1946 to 1947.¹¹⁵

Gizoli Said has argued that, “HASITO began in Atbara in 1946 when **Mustafa Assayed, one of the founders of SCP**, arrived from Khartoum and contacted Alshafie,. They formed the first cell with Gasim Amin, Ibrahim Zakarya, Ibrahim Osman, Abdullah Osman Alrayh and Said Bayoumi.”¹¹⁶ This cell also began to recruit other workers and put on its agenda the organisation of workers i.e. the establishment of a trade union.¹¹⁷ As indicated earlier, the ground was already prepared for this and HASITO members benefited from this situation and from lack of competition from other political parties.

As suggested above, the SCP found and established its first relationship with the working class in the Sudan Railways, and it was from there that the first trade union movement began. Despite close cooperation, the Workers’ Union remained to a greater extent independent from the SCP. Several factors facilitated the activities of the communist cadres among the workers. (1) They were to be found in the workshops and other facilities, which assisted the cadres to discuss critical issues with workers such as organising into a trade union, colonialism, the deteriorating standard of living and the steps to be taken. (2) There already existed workers’ clubs where cultural and social events were held. (3) Workers’ residential areas were nearby

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 68-59.

¹¹⁴ Gadal, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹¹⁵ International Centre for Trade Union Rights, “Sudan: The Labour Movement & Trade Union Rights”, p. 18.

¹¹⁶ Gizoli Said in, “The Communist” No. 150 , 1985, p. 78

¹¹⁷ *ibid*, p.79.

which also helped the cadres to contact the workers without needing to travel or move from one place to another. (4) The general political, cultural and economic situation in the Sudan was a theme which the cadres were able to play on in order to recruit workers for the trade union and the party.

The Sudan Railways workers were able to seize the right to organise in 1949. After the establishment of the Sudan Railways Trade Union, many other workers unions were established all over the Sudan. These included the Sudan Medical Association, the Sudan Builders' Trade Union, the Post-Elementary School Masters' Union, the Municipalities Workers' Union, and the Bahr El Ghazal Mill Workers' Union.¹¹⁸ The establishment of these organisations reflected a general trend among Sudanese workers and employees, both in the private and the public sectors, to organise.

In 1950 the first workers trade union conference was convened and resulted in the establishment of the Sudan Workers Trade Unions Federation (SWTUF), led by Mohamed Alsaid Salam as chairman and Alshafie, Ahmed Al-Sheikh as secretary general.¹¹⁹ The communists remained as leaders of the Federation until 1970 when they were ousted by the Numeiri Regime after a dispute between the government and the party. "The total number of registered unions affiliating to SWTUF was: 1949 – 5, 1950 – 62, 1951 – 86, 1952 – 99, and 1954 – 123."¹²⁰ The total number of members of SWTUF in 1954 reached 150,000.¹²¹ In many instances, the workers' trade union movement, led by the communists, confronted the colonial administration.¹²² In 1951 the SWTUF led a strike to reverse a resolution from

¹¹⁸ Gizoli Said, op. cit. p. 18.

¹¹⁹ Various sources including Gadal, op. cit., p. 60. Both leaders were communists.

¹²⁰ Gizoli Said, op. cit., p. 19.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*, p.60.

the Ministry of Education that expelled 119 higher secondary school students for their political activities.¹²³ Further, the SWTUF supported the police strike and demonstration of 1951. The Secretary General had addressed the demonstration and ensured that the workers supported the police action. Both the secretary and the chairman were arrested and sentenced to two years' and one year's imprisonment respectively. In August 1951, the SWTUF organised a general strike requesting a 75% rise in workers' wages. The SWTUF continued its activities and confrontation with the colonial administration during this period. Also the SWTUF led a general strike called the "Freedoms Strike", where the workers called for the abolition of all laws restricting freedoms.

Under the leadership of the communists, the SWTUF called for the farmers to organise. This call in 1951 paved the way for many farmers to seek to organise farmers and peasants in different modernising projects in Algezira, the Algash Scheme, the White Nile and the Northern Province. The Gezira Scheme was owned by the government in partnership with the farmers, while the White Nile Projects were owned by the private sector. Both of them were in central Sudan between the two Niles. The Algash Scheme was established in the delta of Algash River in the Eastern province of the Sudan.

2.6. The Gezira Farmers' Union

In the Gezira Scheme the SCP began its activities among the peasants around 1951, but in a short period secured a very strong hold. This was mainly due to the fact that the SCP cadres were sent to live among the farmers. The SCP first sent Hasan Salamah, who exerted great efforts on organising the farmers.¹²⁴ The real activity among the peasants in the Gezira began

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.60. The Federation was partially successful in this action as the Ministry decreased the number of dismissed students.

¹²⁴ Kamil Mahjoub, "Tilkah Alayam" (Those Days), First Part, Dar Said, Khartoum, 1999, pp. 63-65. Kamil was a prominent cadre; he worked in Algezira from 1952 until January 1959 when he quit the party due to

in 1952. The cadres were able to live among the peasants and to give them answers to their questions. Kamil Mahjoub said, “The work at the beginning was very difficult, we had to start from scratch, without any help. We began picking promising elements from among the peasants. If I heard a promising story about a peasant, and only knew his name, I would walk miles to meet him.”¹²⁵ This was not always easy, according to Kamil and the following story reflects this:

I went to a certain village south of Al-Gezira, I only knew the farmer’s name. I did not know any other person in the village. When I arrived, I did not find him, he had travelled to Wad Medani for a personal matter and would return the next day in the evening. There was no bus or lorry in the evening and no hotels. I had to spend the whole night, without food, on a lorry in very cold weather.¹²⁶

Kamil has commented on the role played by many communist employees and communist sympathizers.¹²⁷ This support was very important and opened the way for the SCP cadres to reach a broad group of peasants, among whom were the most important trade union and SCP farmer cadres. Kamil said, “We were able to contact the most active elements among the farmers. One of these important elements was the late Alamin Mohamed Alamin.”¹²⁸ Kamil met Alamin while the latter was preparing to travel to Mecca for the Hajj (pilgrimage). They exchanged ideas over the problems in the Gezira Scheme and [the claims of the farmers](#). They agreed to meet after Alamin’s return from Mecca. Their next meeting formed a crucial step towards the establishment of the farmers’ trade union and helped in the spread of SCP cells all over the Gezira Scheme. Kamil says, “We began a series of semi-public meetings with the

differences with the secretary general. The paradox in this story is that Kamil was a relative of the secretary Abdel Khalig.

¹²⁵ *Tilkah Alayam* (Those Days), First Part, Khartoum: Dar Said, 1999, p. 60

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 65.

¹²⁸ *ibid.* [For Alamin see Notes on persons below.](#)

farmers in their villages. This would have been impossible without the help of Alamin.”¹²⁹

The cadres were able in a short period to recruit many farmers to the party and to support the establishment of many cells all over the Gezira.

When the base of supporters among the farmers was broad enough, a preliminary committee for the farmers’ trade union was formed. Its members were twenty-five farmers and its chairman was Alamin. In October 1953, the Gezira farmers convened their constitutive conference. About 792 members representing forty-four inspection sections in the Gezira Scheme attended the conference. Representatives of the Workers’ Trade Unions Federation (WTUF), the Northern Province Farmers’ Union and the Sudanese Workers’ Union in Egypt also attended the conference. It discussed the constitution of the union, elected an executive committee and endorsed the *claims of the farmers*. In December 1953 the government recognized the Gezira Farmers’ Union, after a demonstration organised by the leaders in which 25,000 farmers participated and gathered together in the heart of Khartoum.¹³⁰

After completing the establishment of the Gezira Farmers’ Union, SCP cadres began to direct their attention to farmers in the private projects in the Blue and White Nile, as the situation of the farmers in these projects was abject. According to Kamil, they began to establish cells in towns and to contact the farmers directly. The call to establish a farmers’ union was crucial and immediately the farmers began to support this tendency. Due to the activities of the SCP’s cells in these areas many farmers’ unions were established.¹³¹

2.7. Other Popular Organisations

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 70-76.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 78-80.

Establishing and organising the students' movement was not a difficult job. At the time, there were few secondary schools in the Sudan. Of these five or six were in Khartoum. 1945 -1946 were the years when the students began to demonstrate on the streets every now and then. This was mainly connected to the rising nationalist agenda, particularly after the establishment of the core political parties. Political rallies, seminars and colloquy were organised spreading awareness among the young enthusiastic students. According to many reports the demonstrations were easy to organise.¹³² The SCP was also able to organise a youth movement by establishing the Sudanese Youth Union. The first youth conference was held in 1948, after which the union was established. The conference was called by Awad Abdul Razig, the HASITO secretary at the time. The Youth Union consisted of communists and their friends, but the leading figures in the Youth Union were always communists. This organisation immediately indulged in politics and began to organise young people all over the country, with special focus on towns.¹³³

The SCP also directed its efforts to organising women. In 1947 HASITO established the Communist Women's Association. It should be noted that in those early years even amongst communists let alone under Islamic laws Sudanese women were suppressed and deprived of their basic rights. The Communist Women's Association began its campaign by calling for more educational opportunities for girls and women, equal rights between men and women, equal pay for equal work, and improvements in the standard of living of all women and men. It also called for seizing the people's democratic rights and the expansion of the popular movement. Further, it called for paying attention to women workers in towns and the

¹³² See Kamil Mahjoub, op. cit. and the interview with Kamarat. Also Ahmed Sulieman and Abu Hassabo have told same story in different places.

¹³³ Declassified British National Intelligence document FO 371/B 471 suggests that the Youth Movement was seen by the British as 'potentially dangerous'.

countryside and for the organisation of housewives.¹³⁴ Of course, given traditional gender segregation and gender norms, the SCP needed a different approach to reach women and that was only possible by recruiting women cadres who could talk with women. Writing in the *Communist* magazine in 1985, Khalidah Zahir¹³⁵, a prominent leader and first communist woman, said, “In 1946 we formed the Girls’ Cultural Association, which consisted of many girls, and membership was only for the educated. This endeavour was directly initiated by the HASITO secretariat at the time. We then established an evening class for women.”¹³⁶ The Communist Women’s Association continued its effort in education and in recruiting new cadres for the party.

In 1952, the Sudanese Women Union (SWU) was established and led by communist cadres. At first, the SWU was very limited in membership and only had a social agenda. Based on its conviction that questions of revolution were not to be solved by men alone, the SCP began its campaign to organise women.¹³⁷ According to Khalidah Zahir, the first preliminary conference was attended by 150 women and it elected an executive committee. The SWU organised many activities and had external contacts, especially with women’s organisation in the Eastern Bloc. According to Nafisa Ahmed al-Amin, a founding member of the SWU¹³⁸:

The SWU was born at the hands of Sudanese Omdurman women who succeeded in striking a sound balance between the conflict between the drivers for change and the

¹³⁴ *The Communist* No. 62, published 1954, in the article by Tag Elsir Osman, “The Communist Party and the Question of Women”, in <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=153809>. The quotation from Mr Osman was an evaluation report written by a woman cadre called Hagir.

¹³⁵ Khalidah Zahir Sarour is the first Sudanese woman, along with Rozari Sarkisyan, also a Sudanese woman, to enter the University of Khartoum School of Medicine, and the first woman doctor also together with Rozari. She was an active political figure and prominent communist leader. She established, with Fatima Talib Ismail, the first women organisation, called the Association of Girls, in the Sudan in 1946. Zahir was a member of the central committee of SCP and a prominent women leader.

¹³⁶ Khalidah Zahir, in the *Communist* No. 152, 1986.

¹³⁷ A. Mahjoub, “Marxism & the Liberation of Woman”, the *Communist* No. 131, January 1968. p. 63

¹³⁸ Nafisa Ahmed al-Amin was a leading politician who later left the SCP and SWU to form another organisation with other women called the Sudan Women’s Union.

power of tradition. They were not in a reckless hurry. The SWU was able to gain the confidence of the Sudanese community in a short time. And even those who opposed and attacked the SWU in the name of religion and tradition unintentionally served the SWU and it gained more supporters, relying on the fact that the status of women in Islam has ensured her the right to education, work and a decent life.”¹³⁹

Knowing the importance of public organisations, the SCP also began in 1950 to establish the Peace and Freedom Organisation, which advocated peace based upon the Stockholm Declaration. The Peace and Freedom Organisation was led by many prominent public figures such as Judge Hasan Alboudani who was one of the judges who sympathised with the SCP and was famous for his defence of freedoms and freedom fighters.

In addition to these organisations, the SCP exerted considerable effort in building a cooperative society for the workers in Port Sudan. Workers employed in handling and loading cotton bales were badly paid and exploited. The weekly wage of a team of ten workers (called an *Alkalah*) was four to five pounds. According to Kamarat, after they became organised, their wage reached forty to fifty pounds.¹⁴⁰ SCP cadres also paid attention to the Eastern province, where the Beija and other tribes live. The communists’ cadre began to work closely with the Beija and in 1953 the first SCP cell was established in Aroma, a well-known town in Eastern Sudan and the centre for the Beija tribe. The cadres began to recruit members for the party. They were engaged in discussions with the Beija and were active in organising cultural and educational activities. Furthermore, they also called for the establishment of a farmers’ trade union. After a long struggle, the SCP and its democratic allies were able to establish a Beija political organisation, called the Beija Conference, in 1958.¹⁴¹ The Beija Conference

¹³⁹ An interview with Nafisa Ahmed al-Amin.

¹⁴⁰ An interview with A. Kamarat.

¹⁴¹ Al-Gizoli, in the *Communist*, No. 150.

was a political party devoted to the issues of this region. Six communists were elected onto the first executive committee. The SCP's cadres were also able to recruit some women in this region.

In *The Communist Party and the Southern Question*, 2005, Jaffar Karar describes how the Sudanese Communist Party consistently emphasised that Arabisation and Islamisation in the South were undesirable. In an anticolonial critique it warned that the foreign missionaries in the South were not following the teachings of Christ, which call for love and happiness among people, but rather they taught the people of the South hatred for the people of the North. Moreover, they underestimated the people of the South and attempted to plant suspicion among them saying that if northerners were to come to the South, they would come as slave traders. The Sudanese Communist Party also stressed the importance of the unity of the country arguing that people should have access to all jobs in Sudan, both in the North and the South without distinction or discrimination. It also argued for secular education. As Hasan Al-Tahir Zarrouq put it, "The education in the South can only be advanced if education is separated from the church and others, and the money spent on education should be spent on education only".¹⁴² Moreover in his criticism of the government's policy toward the South at the second session of the Parliament on 15 March 1954, Hasan Al-tahir Zarrouq, the communist member of parliament, called for the Arabic language and the Islamic religion not to be taught in the South because they were foreign to the people of the South. The Communist Party warned against the imposing of the teaching of Arabic and Islamic religion instead of the languages, dialects and beliefs existing in the South of Sudan and called for the

¹⁴² Speech given in the first session of the House of Representatives, No. 34 January 1954. *The Communist Party and the Southern Question*, 2005, p. 65

development and upgrading of these cultures and languages.¹⁴³

According to *The Sudanese Left in the last 10 Years 1955-65* by Mohamed Sulieman, published in 1965, throughout the 1950s, most of the literature of the Communist Party did not neglect references to the South and the issues of economic and social development. In May 1955, the leftist labour unions in answer to the first speech of the first Prime Minister on the government's policy towards the working class, demanded that the equal pay rule be applied immediately and without discrimination to both North and South. On August 16, 1955, in front of parliament, Hasan al-Tahir Zarrouq called for the immediate commencement of measures for self-determination and full withdrawal of Britain and Egypt to achieve the country's freedom. The SCP had one central committee member from the mid-1950s to 1989. Party members originally from South Sudan tended to be living in the North. The SCP sent a cadre to the South to work among the Southerners. Conditions for recruitment were far from favourable because 99% of the tribes in the south practised a mixture of Christian and African religions. Due to these efforts the SCP was the first and the last Sudanese political party until 1989, to have members from among the Southerners.¹⁴⁴ Joseph Garang from South Sudan was one of the leading SCP members and a member of the central committee until he was executed with other leaders in the 1971 massacre. He was replaced by Joseph Mudisto. The SCP was also tried to establish youth and women movements in the South.

Some cadres travelled to the Nuba Mountains, in central West Sudan, and began their activities there. They sought first to organise the farmers and later to build a base for the SCP. In this region, the SCP faced many problems related to ethnicity and politics. The farmers

¹⁴³ Al'ayam Newspaper, May 22, 1954 quoted in *The Communist Party and the Southern Question*, 2005, p. 71.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 1 note 6.

union had insufficient resources to address the problems in the region. Prominent among the SCP cadres who worked there were Yousif A/majied, Hasan Salamah and Hasanin Hasan. They succeeded in building a base for the SCP in those undeveloped areas and established good contact with the people. Oral history interviews suggest that the SCP was highly respected there.

Lastly, the SCP exerted efforts to establish a strong organisation within the security and armed forces. Not much information is available about this organisation. However, it is generally known that the SCP established the Free Officers Organisation in the armed forces, which was a coalition between communist officers and democratic elements in the army.¹⁴⁵ Also, there was another organisation for other ranks and ordinary soldiers, but there seems to be no information about it. The Free Officers' Organisation had its cells in different branches of the armed forces and in the police, the security and prison guards. The organisation was very active within the armed forces during the 1950s and 1960s but was dismantled in 1971 when Numeiri executed its leaders and imprisoned the rest of the group. Among those executed were Brigadier Babikr Alnour, Mahjoub Talga, Hashim Alata and Abu Shiba.¹⁴⁶

2.8. The SCP and the Cultural Domain

¹⁴⁵ The Free Officers Organisation was mainly established as part of the Leninist doctrine held by Communists that any revolutionary movement needs a source of armed support. The Egyptian Free Officers had no influence upon those in Sudan.

¹⁴⁶ Brigadier Babikr Alnour was the leading communist officer. When the Coup of July 1971 occurred, he was with Farouk Hamada Allah, also an officer in the Free Officers Organisation, in London. Their plane was hijacked by the Gaddafi Regime and they were arrested and delivered to the Numeiri Regime which returned to power after three days. They were immediately executed along with Hashim Alatta, the actual leader of the July 1971 coup. Abu Shiba, the Republican Guard leader and underground communist cadre, was famous for providing a secret hiding place to the Secretary General Abdel Khalig Mahjoub during the period of the dispute between the SCP and the Numeiri Regime was also executed with many others.

Classical Marxism views culture as a super structural component of the capitalist mode of production. Marx referred rarely to cultural phenomena in his writings, while Lenin invited cadres to invest interest in culture and the education of the masses. As Kellner argues:

The economic base of society for Marx and Engels consisted of the forces and relations of production in which culture and ideology are constructed to help secure the dominance of ruling social groups. This influential base/superstructure model considers the economy the base or foundation of society and cultural, legal, political, and additional forms of life are conceived as "superstructures" which grow out of and serve to reproduce the economic base.¹⁴⁷

For classical Marxist theory, culture is firmly tied to the mode of production. If culture is to change, the base structure has to change first. However the SCP was not totally submissive to such Marxist analysis. In Egypt, which had a great influence on Sudanese communists, Taha Husein began debates on literature and engagement in 1948.¹⁴⁸ Yet these debates did not affect the SCP as a Marxist Leninist organisation to any great extent at least not at first. In the early years the SCP did not have an alternative Marxist source that tackled culture differently from those classical works of Marx and Lenin. However, local needs and the SCP leaders' intellectual contributions to the party led the SCP to tackle the question once again in the early 1950s as part of the study of the South Sudan Question. The SCP, after researching the issue, reached the conclusion, that it was important to recognise "the cultural differences between north and south, and the right of southerners in the use of local languages in education."¹⁴⁹ The SCP also contributed many translations of Marxist writings in different fields to help its cadres and the intelligentsia in general to adapt Marxism to Sudanese

¹⁴⁷ Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Marxism and Cultural Studies", (<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>)

¹⁴⁸ Taha Husein, 1948.

¹⁴⁹ Tag Elsir Osman Babo, "How Marxism is Connected to the Sudanese Reality", <http://www.sudaress.com/sudaneseonline/14661>

conditions. Furthermore, to express its interest in culture and its development by attracting workers in this field, the SCP published two cultural magazines: “*Consciousness (Elwaia)*” and “*New Dawn (Elfajar Elgadeed)*”.¹⁵⁰

Despite all these efforts the cultural, intellectual and ideological weakness of the SCP members remained issues that the leadership returned to every now and then and expressed concerns over. In 1956, in a document titled “Towards the re-enforcement of Independence, Democracy and Peace”, the SCP pointed to the weakness of the intellectual activities among both the leaders and the members.¹⁵¹ The weakness was further emphasized in a publication in 1957, which alluded to two points: “1. Studying Marxism in relation to reality and not in isolation from the lived experiences of the party; and 2. Full-time intellectuals (professionals) must play a role in the political and intellectual education of members.”¹⁵²

In 1963 the SCP opened a debate over “working among the masses” where the party critiqued the members who did not work diligently among the people and directed its members insisting that a communist must assume responsibility in this area. A few years later the SCP published its Fourth Conference Report called, “Marxism and the Issues of the Sudanese Revolution”,¹⁵³ in which the SCP used its knowledge of both Marxism and Sudanese society to produce a very important document. The document treated many political, social, cultural and international issues. Also it tackled organisational issues. In 1968 the SCP translated Gramsci’s works in a move to express interest in cultural issues and to develop its cadres. These contributions were very important and the SCP viewed writers, poets, producers and

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² *El-Shuwia 'a Magazine*, dated 03.08.1957.

¹⁵³ SCP, “Marxism and the Issues of Sudanese Revolution,” (in Arabic) 1967.

workers in the media and culture fields as an important target for recruitment to the ranks of the party.

In the 1930s, cultural and literary clubs in towns had witnessed the start of Sudanese political movements. In the towns, where the percentage of educated people was reasonably high, political activism began in literary clubs. These clubs were closely connected to many cultural forms and activities. Poets, journalists, storytellers, stage writers and directors were introduced to members and audiences listened to them. The general trend among these activists and their messages focused on national unity and identity, the struggle against foreign domination and the future of the Sudan. Many of the founding members of the SCP were members of such clubs so it safe to say that they acquired their initial political consciousness from them. As books were scarce at the time, the Reader Clubs influenced their members' choices. As argued earlier, in the 1940s and 1950s when the SCP came into being, oral culture was still dominant in Sudan, mainly in the form of storytelling, poetry and travel narratives. Indeed poets and storytellers assumed a prominent position *in the social sphere*. Most of the active social and political agents depended, and still depend, on oral communication with the population. From its inception the SCP was well connected to people working in the arts, literature, poetry and culture more generally. Outstanding poets, writers and stage producers, in one way or another, had links with the members of the party. Some of them were actual members and played pivotal roles in different Sudanese uprisings and in enriching Sudanese culture. While many did not remain in the party, they were still affected by its vision of modernisation, development and freedom.

In the course of my research I looked at documents published by the SCP's Cultural Secretariat. Among them was one particularly important document titled, "Communists'

Sensitivity towards Creativity and Literary Creators”¹⁵⁴ from 1976. This document gets its significance from putting the subject of culture at the centre of discussion. It focused on cultural workers and their relationship with SCP. “Communists’ Sensitivity” was the first written contribution on this subject.¹⁵⁵ It was mainly directed at members, giving them directives on how to act towards members involved in literary production and with other literary creators. However reading this document raises more questions than it answers and throws little light on how the SCP saw the status of culture in the social formation. It remains unclear whether or not in everyday practice culture remained relegated to being a super-structural reflection of the base while the party focused on political and organisational aspects. Further questions arise when we study the biographies and autobiographies of many poets, writers and producers, who were party members for a period, long or short. These include the question of whether the SCP treated them as contributors to the enrichment of the Sudanese national culture or merely as a stock to be recruited to benefit the party and to disseminate its ideas. Also of interest is how SCP members treated those creative members who deserted the party.¹⁵⁶

For a long time, the SCP had been interested in mobilising the masses. Mobilisation depended on how near an active organisation was to the people. For its first twenty years, 1946 -1964, the SCP was interested in culture, performers and recruiting them to its ranks because they had a very strong influence upon the population. Many educated, cultural activists were recruited to the party in this period. But the SCP had rivals who were active on all fronts. Political parties such as the Muslim Brothers used Sudanese cultural heritage to fight back against the spread of communism, by accusing the SCP members of being atheists and

¹⁵⁴ “Naho Hasa-sieya Shiyouia Tigah Al-ibda’a wa Al-Mubdieen”(Towards a Communist Sensitivity to Creativity and Creators”, 1976, published in <http://www.alrakoba.net/articles-action-show-id-61958.htm>

¹⁵⁵ This document is part of a series called “Kaatib Elshona”(Alshona Writer) mainly focusing on cultural and intellectual contribution.

¹⁵⁶ My range of interviewees did not provide answers to these questions which warrant further future research.

suggesting that the SCP strived for decadence and debauchery. Also other political parties, **such as the Umma and Unionist**, accused the SCP of importing their political thought. It is possible that such accusation forced the SCP to revert to the use of cultural heritage to foster its cause among the people. In this battle, six years after its foundation, the SCP began to discuss the issues of culture and the intellectual theoretical development of its members. A document titled “Towards Strengthening and Expanding of our Party” indicated that the SCP suffered from: 1. Very weak theoretical activity. 2. It was unable to bring Marxism to Sudanese people. 3. The SCP was weak in translating Marxist books.¹⁵⁷ Also this same document indicated that the SCP was failing to clarify the key political and social issues to the Sudanese people from a Marxist view point, and to publish such clarification.¹⁵⁸ The same author, who was the cultural secretary of the SCP, went further to say: “The SCP did not publish even one Marxist book on the history of Sudan, or about the 1924 Sudanese revolution, or about the national movement, or on national literature in Sudan.”¹⁵⁹ The reasons given for all these weaknesses were directly related to the SCP’s practical and pragmatic activities, such as the building of workers, farmers, youth, and women organisations¹⁶⁰ It can be argued therefore that the SCP failed to make a genuine contribution due to intellectual and cultural shortcomings.¹⁶¹ The SCP leadership attributed the primary reason for this failure to the fact that the membership could not shoulder the burden of intellectual and ideological struggle.¹⁶² This last point means one thing: intellectual and cultural ideological weakness.

¹⁵⁷ SCP, “Towards Strengthening and Expansion of our Party”, 1952.

¹⁵⁸ Tag Elsir Osman, “Over the experience of Cultural Work in SCP”, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=138794> dated 25.06.2008. Accessed on 23/08/2018.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² *ibid.*

As a modern institution, the SCP has had to adapt to local cultures, both African and Arab and their customs, traditions and languages. It was thought that this would bring the party near to the population. This is expressed in one of the SCP's pamphlets: "From the people and to the people; we learn from them and we teach them..." Furthermore, the SCP has had to respond to the aspirations of the people and the working class, who were eager to learn and to be enlightened. In the course of its first years, the SCP established illiteracy eradication classes, and later reading classes. Many working class cadres were taught how to read and write and speak to audiences and other issues related to activism. Moreover the SCP established teaching classes to spread the culture of the working class. In such classes Sudanese customs and traditions were discussed such as those concerned with cooperation, guests and refugees' protection.

The SCP discussed national culture at two levels: local traditions and customs including languages, dialects, popular religion and their role in the struggle for an equitable society, especially against capitalist exploitation and colonial power. Local cultures and languages were a great vehicle through which the SCP built bridges with the local population in remote areas. Producing press releases, communications and pamphlets in their own language or dialect was successful that led many of the traditional leaders in such remote societies to respect the SCP in general. But always where there were sympathisers, there were also enemies, and this was no exception. The SCP attempted to contribute to the concept of an inclusive national culture as part of the national struggle against colonial power and imperialism and within such debates the SCP called for the emancipation of women and their development as part of the Sudanese population. Here the enemies saw their chance. In traditional Sudanese society women's status was determined by the family, the tribe and customs. No woman was or is a free citizen and so speaking about the rights of women and equality between the sexes was and is a great problem.

The SCP began to show interest in different forms of culture products: theatre, painting, cinema etc. In all these endeavours the SCP was and is seeking to communicate and contact the people. The SCP built support for intellectual cadres such as poets, writers, performers, musicians and the like.¹⁶³ But, the SCP was not always able to keep those members as long term members. The SCP indicated this by saying, “We must be aware that intellectuals who join the Party will remain in its ranks only if ‘democratic centralism’ is properly ‘applied’, and if they are allowed to develop their views, and their criticism have effects in the party and if they are allowed to develop and grow within the framework of Marxism-Leninism.”¹⁶⁴

As the intellectual, cultural, and theoretical work among the SCP was and is still weak, the party has not had a core group of intellectuals who could theorise for the party in certain areas. Although now the SCP has created a cultural secretary responsible for cultural, intellectual and educational activities, the endeavour is still developing. Furthermore, the SCP was and is keen to have a special secretariat in each cell concerned with cultural activities. The cell or the branch are the building blocks of the party, as analysed in detail in Chapter 2. How the cell or the branch should understand the concept of culture was and is not given centrally. The cultural secretary should work hard in the cultural field in the widest sense and sensitise members to contributing to creative thinking, writing etc. However, this secretariat has always been overshadowed by daily activism. In practice, this position was not evaluated, appreciated and valued.

In July 1968 the SCP expressed interest in different forms of cultural expression and soon began to recruit artists, singers, actors, writers, poets etc. A special secretariat was established for this purpose in the early stages of its inception and monitored closely by the Central

¹⁶³ The SCP, actually communists performers and friends, established Abadamak theater Group. Also the SCP established Lyric Chior consisting of singers and musicians. These are only samples of SCP endeavors.

¹⁶⁴ Issues after the SCP Conference, July 1968.

Committee. Prominent Sudanese poets such as the late Mahjoub Sheriff, Gadal,,Humeid,, and singers such as late Mohammad Wardi, Mustafa Sid Ahmed, and Mohammed Alamin were either members of or sympathisers with the party. Creative writing and experimental theatre were established by communist students in higher education as early as the mid-sixties. Further, the communist members contributed to the establishment of the Music, Theatre and Cinema Institute, the only one of its kind in Sudan. This institution teaches modern, traditional and local music, performance etc. Also the SCP infiltrated the broadcast media through its cadres, but they did not have the upper hand. Communist members have, however, played roles in the production of radio programmes. From 1960s onwards, SCP members working in theatre performances and other related areas were influenced by Egyptian street theatre and its direct relation with audiences.

At a later stage, towards the end of the 1960s, the SCP students developed the University Theatre, and its cadres in the area of performance developed the famous SCP Choir. Many of the musician members of the SCP, or musicians who grew up in the SCP, singers and their friends produced outstanding performances for the Sudanese public during the 40th Anniversary of the SCP in 1986. Other forms of cultural engagement include cultural journeys and convoys to towns and villages, where SCP cultural workers and artists came into direct contact with the population. These journeys aimed to spread literacy and political awareness. In the 1960s, as a result of the SCP interest in cultural and literary societies in high schools, book clubs were developed to benefit both members and the SCP. From there they were able to recruit some of the most promising members, and also help the process of women's emancipation. The SCP was successful in recruiting poets, artists, musicians and others working in the cultural fields, many of whom have contributed to both local and national debates.

2.9. International Comparisons

The SCP experience was very distinctive when compared to European ones. There were many major differences, but there were also some similarities due in part to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of democratic centralism which is discussed below. Generally, society in Sudan was based upon a tribal system, where the social tribal system and extended families played a pivotal role in all walks of life **and they still do**. Even during the old Sudanese kingdoms, the tribal system's role had remained intact. Thus when the tribal system was besieged by **Turco-Egyptian** occupation, its leaders began to revolt. In the tribal system the elders played a central role. Conflicts were settled via tribal negotiations and courts. From its beginning, the SCP realised that it would have to work with rather than against the tribal system.

The SCP was established within the overall struggle against colonialism, for national liberation and independence. This national struggle was led by Sudanese elites from different political, social and religious backgrounds. The vast majority of the Sudanese people lived in rural and remote areas and at this time, transport and **communication facilities** were non-existent until the mid-1950s. This put extra burdens on the shoulders of the SCP cadres who were commissioned by the party to reach particular remote areas.

Unlike in many European countries when communist parties were well established, in Sudan, as described above, the working class was very small and concentrated in companies established by the government. The Sudan Railways Company was perhaps the most important of these companies. Meanwhile the capitalist class was very tiny, and most of its members were active in internal trade. The industrial sector was also very small, concentrating on the processing industries. There was no heavy industrial sector or assembly lines where great number of workers could be employed.

It should also be noted here that the SCP, when established as HASITO in the mid-forties, had leaders who were very young. Their average age was in their twenties. Most of them had heard or read about communism either from the Egyptians during their study in Egypt or from British soldiers and employees, some of whom were Fabians and others were members of the British Communist Party. With the exception of the Literary Clubs that I mentioned earlier, Sudanese intellectual spheres lacked such movements and currents as syndicalism, anarchism etc.

The SCP leaders did not experience the long historical exposure to cultures of modernity dominant within the European communist movement. European Communists were influenced by many factors including the legacies of the Enlightenment, and many intellectual debates nourished the consciousness of both the general public and the elites. The Industrial Revolution was crucial to the growth of socialism. Further, the rise of the nation state in Europe and European national wars had also created a feeling of belonging to a certain territory. In Sudan the newly emerging society was yet to go through the national struggle for independence from British rule and imperialism. In a traditional society where the extended family and religious leaders played a pivotal role, those SCP leaders had to invent means to convince others to join them. Also Sudanese culture showed respect to the elders in the family, and still does, and allocated them an important role in decision making in issues related to political, social and even personal affairs such as marriage. All in all one is confronted by the conservatism of the elderly.

Unlike European communist parties, which were established upon a base of trade unionism and socio-political movements such as the Fabian movement, the SCP began as a reaction to colonialism with the aim of liberating Sudan from foreign domination and simultaneously

contesting the inertia of traditional parties' elites. The SCP was established at the same time as the establishing of the first working class trade union. A useful example of the differences between Sudan and Europe is a comparison with the Germany Communist Party (KPD), which emerged in the course of the First World War, with strong intellectual leaders such as Liebknecht and Luxemburg, who provided a political and ideological orientation for the party.¹⁶⁵ SCP had no such leaders until mid-fifties when its third General Secretary, Abdelkhalig Mahjoub, was elected. As Eric D. Weitz argues, the "Communist Party of Germany was born amid the conflagration of total war and mass working-class protests...German communism, like its European counterparts, remained a child of the war."¹⁶⁶ The struggles led by the German working class and its allies were an inspiring example to SCP members. However, the conditions of the Sudanese working class were totally different. In a fully developed capitalist society such as Germany, with a democratic base, a huge working class and a strong established capitalist class, there were venues for the class struggle in the streets, parliament, trade unions etc. Contrary to Sudan, where the real capitalist was the colonial state itself, with a small, narrow industrial sector base. The vast majority of the population were farmers living in remote rural areas, which posed extra challenges for the SCP cadres. At the time the working class was tiny and concentrated in the governmental sector. Yet from the founding of the first cell in 1946, the party began actively to work among the working class in Atbara, where the main concentration of workers was to be found. The importance of Atbara town could be loosely compared with that Essen in Germany in the Weimar Republic and Sudan Railways with Krupp.¹⁶⁷ Atbara was a centre of enlightenment for workers, organising them, fighting for better living standard, better health

¹⁶⁵ Eric D. Weitz., *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State*, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 64-71.

and housing within the company. Workers strikes and demonstrations either for better working conditions or for national issues usually and always began in Atbara.

A major point of contrast between Atbara and Essen was that Essen was an industrial hub in a developed economy, while Atbara consisted of the Railway's headquarters, maintenance workshops and some other service facilities. Also Atbara was unique in Sudan, because for the first time there were thousands of workers in just one place. As Ahmed Sikainga states, "Within the Sudanese context, the railway workers were distinguished by their sheer size, stability, skills, and their pioneering role in the development of the Sudanese labor movement."¹⁶⁸ Further, Atbara workers were unique, since as Sikainga says:

In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, the labour movement established close links with either politically moderate nationalist movements or leftist organisations that espoused some populist ideologies. In the Sudanese case, however, since its inception in the late 1940s, the railway workers movement had been closely associated with a Marxist-Leninist party, namely the (SCP).¹⁶⁹

Within the African context, the SCP differs for example from the Algerian and South African communist parties, due to the differences in social and political structures.¹⁷⁰ As Sikainga states:

Until the party's destruction in 1971 in the aftermath of an abortive coup, the SCP was considered the largest and the most influential communist party in Africa and the Middle East, second only to the South African Communist Party. Through its mobilization of workers, peasants, students, professionals, and other groups, such as

¹⁶⁸ Ahmed Sikainga, "Organised Labour and Social Change in Contemporary Sudan", Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper No. 2, ISSN 1476-4830, p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ Alison Drew, "Communism in Africa", in S. A. Smith (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (2014), chapter 16, pp. 285-302.

youth, women, the SCP built a powerful popular movement that played a pivotal role in Sudanese politics.¹⁷¹

Many factors played a role in this. First of all, in a vast country like Sudan, land was the property of the government, and local communities. Contrary to the experience of settler colonialism such as in South Africa and Algeria, land remained under government control. Also land rights remained in the hands of local communities. Further, the vast majority of the population were small farmers, depending on rainfall cultivation, without any mechanized farming, and one could imagine how difficult it was for SCP cadres to organise such farmers and rural inhabitants. The vast majority depended on family manual work and in times of harvest, collective village volunteers. Such a social background made it difficult for the young SCP leaders to penetrate the rural areas. Yet their success in organising the farmers, in the Gezira Scheme in central Sudan, encouraged them to attempt other remote backward areas. In this respect, the SCP depended upon farmers themselves. That means men who had no formal education, depending upon their eloquence, traditional education in religious schools (*Khalwa*), and traditional status. In this respect, SCP recruited even religious men to its ranks such as Sheikh El-Khier.

2.10. The SCP, the CPSU and the Eastern Bloc

One may doubt the claims that the Sudanese communists were completely independent from both Soviet directives and influences. As indicated in the previous chapter, the influence of the Politburo of the CPSU and the Central Committee's Department for Foreign Relations after the dissolution of the Communist International in 1943 was major. Indeed it can be seen in the internal structures of the SCP, which were based on the Soviet 'democratic centralist' model and the role Eastern Bloc more generally in shaping and supporting the party through

¹⁷¹ Sikainga, op. cit., p. 10.

education and training and some limited medical and financial aid until the end of the Cold War. Most of the financial aid has never been disclosed and my interviewees suggest that it was not significant in magnitude. Training for cadres was also kept secret. However, study opportunities in technical institutes and universities in Eastern Bloc were always announced. Annually candidates were selected from either the SCP membership, its friends or the general public following certain established procedures. The candidate had to apply through a branch, in residential area or workplace, if s/he was member, if not then through a member in a branch. The branch would discuss and decide on the application, either recommending or rejecting it. If recommended then a higher organ would assess the application and give recommendation. A central selection committee would decide upon the application. After that a liaison officer would contact the branch and request contact with the candidate to arrange for visas, etc.

The continued assertion made by Party ideologues, that the SCP was a post-Comintern party and completely independent from its influence and legacies, cannot be upheld in the light of my research. However the degree of adherence to Soviet models in Sudanese strategies and day-to-day practice was arguably much less than in Europe. The proximity to Moscow and the immediacy of the Cold War had compelled East European communists to adhere to Stalinist ideas and methods of organising their political parties after 1945 and made any changes after Stalin's death slow and difficult.¹⁷² As Weitz argues:

Communists did not operate in conditions of their own choosing.... Unwittingly, places of engagement shape movements' political culture. Movements that arise within existing democratic structures have an array of spaces open to them, which may serve to absorb and moderate even the most militant sounding group. Dictatorships, in contrast,

¹⁷² The GDR is a good illustration of this. For more see Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

severely constrict the range of political space, and even movements most committed to democracy will reproduce some of the authoritarian traits of their oppressors when they are forced to operate conspiratorially and clandestinely.¹⁷³

The importance of Sudanese dictatorships in shaping the development of the SCP after the end of colonialism, however, did not preclude SCP from falling under the umbrella of Soviet influence and Stalinism both of which affected the structure and functioning of the party as discussed in detail in Chapter 3.¹⁷⁴ However the importance of looking at how “a particular kind of popular base and social setting also shaped the character and strategy of individual Communist Parties” is particularly important in the case of Sudan since, as Weitz argues, it is important to take account of the links of the “local with the national” and international dimensions.¹⁷⁵

While SCP ideologists maintained that Stalinism was far from being applicable to Sudan, and young leaders exerted efforts to keep their distance from any possible influence even from their Egyptian counterparts, many aspects of Soviet style democratic centralism structured party life. In rejecting the relevance of Soviet models at the ideological level, leaders were aware that such influence also meant control and they struggled for independence even within the Sudanese political arena. Furthermore, they argued that this stand was mainly due to the SCP’s study of the local situation in the Sudan and to adapting Marxism to local conditions. Moreover, from the early period of its establishment, SCP leaders confirmed that their party

¹⁷³ Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890 -1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State*, Princeton University Press, 1997, p.6.

¹⁷⁴ My use of Stalinism reflects that of Hermann Weber, writing about the KPD in ‘The Stalinization of the KPD: Old and New Views’, Chapter 2 of *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917 to 53*, edited by Norman La Porte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008, pp. 22-44.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p.13

would adhere to a programme to implement social and political justice rather than atheism and would not fight any religion whatsoever and in particular Islam, the belief of the majority in Sudan. To understand the position on Stalinism, we have to understand that the SCP's development did not happen in a straight line. There were periods which showed a strong rise in the influence of the party, particularly the first 15 years after its inception 1946-1961. For the purposes of analysis, I call this the "promising period". After a short period in a democratic regime from 1964-1969, the party entered into conflict with the Numeiri Regime that ended into the 1971 massacre of its leaders and which was followed by what can be called the "stagnation period". When it returned to the political arena in 1985, the SCP was weak and shattered. The party experienced a short period of democratic rule from April 1985 to June 1989. Then once again after the coup of 30 June 1989, the party faced a setback in a context in which support from the Eastern Bloc ceased in the wake of *Perestroika* and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Now the SCP is seeking to develop links with the other political parties and the population to stand against the current suppressive Islamist regime.

In its most promising period, the SCP was characterised by enthusiasm and intense interest in Marxism. The SCP was allied to the international communist movement and adhered to many directives coming from Moscow. Although many members and leaders insisted that the SCP was independent from outside influence, many incidents proved the contrary. Many of founders and senior cadres had their first training and study of Marxism in the Eastern Bloc. The training courses were in Marxism-Leninism, political economy, socialism, organisational matters, security of the party, and also the use of small arms. The cadres who attended these courses were completely saturated with the experience of these countries and the type of Marxism taught there. As Dr. Elzailae argues, in all the early writings in newspapers and magazines of the SCP there "was an adoption of the Stalinist political line especially in their

fierce attack on the non-labouring classes."¹⁷⁶ Dr. Elzailae further alludes to many other features of what he terms 'intellectual inertia' that affected the leading organs and membership of the party. Some of these features include: the SCP's adoption of the Soviet stand towards national political parties, and its adoption of a centralised model of democracy, as opposed to parliamentary democracy.¹⁷⁷ Further, in applying Marxism to the Sudanese social and economic situation, the SCP used Leninist classifications of class, specifically in the case of farmers.¹⁷⁸ This was not appropriate to the situation in Sudan at the time. The farmers in Sudan did not own the land, the land was completely owned by the government. Also Sudan had subsistence farming in many rural areas.

The paradoxes of the SCP is explored by Siddiq Elzailae in his chapter "The Relation of SCP with the ICM [the Soviet-led International Communist Movement] and its negative impact", where he sets out to prove the existence of this relation and its ideological impact from the inception of the SCP and until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Elzailae argues that "the SCP was affected in every way by the ideas and methods" of the ICM and that "these provided the SCP's basic intellectual framework. The SCP adopted ICM activities and methods."¹⁷⁹ At the same time, he acknowledges that "The Sudanese communists are proud that their party was independent of the ICM." This feeling is, according to Elzailae:

Acceptable and justified because the SCP played crucial roles in organizing the workers, farmers, employees and artisans in modern trade unions; contributed to enriching the Sudanese national culture; offered and are offering sacrifices in defending

¹⁷⁶ Dr. S. Elzailae, "Is it possible to Renew the Sudan Communist Party", in the Seventieth Anniversary of the SCP (1946 - 2016), Afag Gadiedah Lildrasat, UK, 2016. p. 18 - 22. (In Arabic).

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.* p. 19.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.* p. 19

¹⁷⁹ "The Relation of SCP with the ICM and its negative impact", in Siddiq Elzailae (ed.) "The Sudanese Left and the Russian Revolution: the Impact of Victory and the Lessons of Collapse" (published in Arabic) 2018, p.69.

democracy and struggling against dictatorial regimes; exerted sincere efforts to study Sudanese social reality, presented progressive and practical solutions to its basic problems and SCP leaders showed steadfastness before courts and capital punishment; and the SCP produced many of the greatest Sudanese artists.¹⁸⁰

My own research would suggest that in reality the SCP's relationship to the Soviet Union and the IMC varied over the period between the founding of the SCP and the fall of the Soviet Union. As Elzailae acknowledges, many writers, researchers and leaders, including many of my interviewees, confirm that the SCP, while adopting Marxist-Leninist party structures, remained independent of the ICM. For example Fuad Matar, a Lebanese journalist wrote in 1973, "The SCP insists on being independent, has freedom of thought and takes appropriate positions consistent with the traditions and customs of a society like the Sudanese one."¹⁸¹ This position is supported by Dr. Gadai who argues that neither HASITO nor the SCP had a relation with the International Communist Movement until 1958, by which time the party had matured sufficiently to maintain its independence:

In this year a group of SCP leaders visited the Socialist Republic of Bulgaria to attend a Conference of the Bulgarian Communist Party. After this visit a direct relationship with the ICM began. However, this relationship began after the SCP reached maturity and was able to maintain a certain degree of independence and not drifting behind the Soviet policies.¹⁸²

While this is very likely to be the case, early Soviet influence on HASITO and the SCP came indirectly via the French Communist, active in Egypt, Henri Curiel, and via Story and other

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.* p.71

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Elzailae. p.73.

¹⁸² *ibid.* p.73.

British communists who helped establish the organisation. Later on, it is evident from available facts, that the SCP was influenced by the Soviet stand in the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and events in Poland.¹⁸³ Also the SCP adhered to Moscow's position on the Chinese Revolution and the development of European Communism. It is clear that the SCP was influenced during this period by many external factors that reflected Cold War politics.

2.11. An Uneven Development

The fall of the Eastern Bloc adversely affected the SCP. In 1992 the leadership of the party decided to open venues for a general discussion of the Soviet experience, and the philosophical and ideological foundations of the party. However, this general discussion of Marxism-Leninism was a failure. The application of centralised democracy choked any real intellectual contribution within the party. As Dr. Elzailae has correctly concluded, "In Centralised Democracy what is acceptable is the point of view of the single member or views of SCP's bodies commissioned by the leadership."¹⁸⁴ As noted by many scholars and political activists, the socio-economic and intellectual issues nowadays, which include globalisation, need teams of experts with various specialisations. Such teams within the party were prohibited. As a result, the intellectual, cultural, and theoretical work among the SCP was and is still weak and the party has not had a core group of intellectuals who could theorise and strategize for the party in important areas. Although now the SCP has created a cultural secretary responsible for cultural, intellectual and educational activities, the endeavour is still developing. Furthermore, the SCP was and is keen to have a special secretariat in each cell concerned with cultural activities. The cell and the branch are the building blocks of the party, as analysed in detail in Chapter 3.

¹⁸³ *ibid.* p. 19.

¹⁸⁴ Elzailae, *op cit.* p. 23.

Although in the period after Independence the SCP has lost many of its pioneer founding members, such as Awad Abdularazig and others, due to the first and second splits in the fifties, it continued to grow steadily but was not transformed into the mass party as envisaged by the leaders. Compared to many European CPs, whose membership exceeded thousands, the SCP grew from some hundreds in the first five years to maybe 1,000 members in the early sixties.¹⁸⁵ However, the SCP did not depend upon the size of its membership for its impact, but upon organising allies in many different organisations. Through such organisation the SCP had a strong mobilising effect. Despite its small membership, the SCP continued to present itself as the leader of the 'masses'. Yet the stands and positions of the SCP leadership over many issues were ambiguous. That led to many splits in and defections from of the party. Each intellectual struggle within the SCP led, in the period 1946 to 1970, to a split and to weakening the party and its leadership. Although Dr. Elzailae says: "Each intellectual struggle over issues within the SCP is classified as class struggle in society,"¹⁸⁶ that was not the case on the ground and it is an oversimplification of the social struggle, conflicting ideas and different points of view in contention.

Until the Coup of 1969 and its aftermath, the SCP considered itself a leader of popular classes and believed that the working class, through its party would take power and govern the country. That proved to be pure illusion. The Sudanese working class was and still is a tiny class in a country overwhelmingly of farmers. As outlined above, in this period about 80% of the Sudanese population were resident in rural areas and 85% of the total population were engaged in the agricultural sector. The industrial sector employed less than 5% of the total

¹⁸⁵ Estimate was given in interview with Tigani. It is difficult to verify this from other sources. Particularly SCP had never a registered membership.

¹⁸⁶ Elzailae, op. cit. p. 20.

labour force. While the service sector employed the rest. Thus alleging that the workers would be dominant reflected how the SCP in its discourse privileged ideology over actual knowledge of the social landscape. Today, the service sector leads the economy and employs more than 45% of the total active population and with rising urbanisation many farmers have left their villages and joined the swelling informal employment sector in big cities.

During its initial period of growth, the SCP adhered to some Leninist concepts and applied them literally to the Sudanese situation. Lenin had rejected parliamentary democracy and considered it as false and a paradise for the rich. For that same reason the SCP was reluctant to accept and adopt parliamentary democracy. Although SCP participated in elections and called for freedom of elections and organisation, it attempted to use its officers in the army to overthrow the elected government. However, this position changed after 1977 when the SCP accepted parliamentary democracy completely and called for rejection of other means to reach political power. This did not however change the internal structures and practices of the party. In contrast to some European communist parties which had a Soviet version of socialism imposed by the Red Army after 1945, the SCP gained access to governmental power through the coup of 25 May 1969, and through the participation of its army officers. Despite the fact that the party overtly denounced the coup, some of its members contributed to the government that was appointed by the coup leaders. During this period the SCP began to negotiate with the new regime over the independence of the party and many other issues. When the regime reached the conclusion that the SCP was against its policies, the regime fired all communist officers and detained the Secretary General of the party. Within these two years 1969 -1971 the SCP entered into a fierce internal intellectual conflict between two groups. One represented the Leninist SCP leadership and the other represented a current that called for the dissolution of the party and integration into the new regime. In practice the new regime

adopted the SCP's economic, social and political programme and for this reason the group thought that the SCP should integrate into the new regime and try to further the revolution. Another group led by the Secretary General considered these ideas to be opportunist and engaged in direct intellectual conflict with them. This conflict ended with a great loss of membership and leaders. Half of the Central Committee left the party. Also many members defected. After the Communists' abortive coup of 1971, some of the remaining influential leaders were executed in July 1971 and hundreds of members and their friends were detained. Because of the execution of its leaders, the SCP had to spend many years reorganising, and reconstructing. It returned to its activities gradually but as a very weak, small political party.

2.12. SCP Party Culture

Most communist parties, wherever they are located, forge a party culture that combines local and more general features and the SCP is no exception. As elsewhere, SCP leaders and rank and file were taught to express solidarity with other communists worldwide and with the Soviet Union in particular. The Soviet Union was considered the pioneer in building socialism and a leading example for communists in Sudan. This is comparable with European CPs. However, the SCP differs from these European parties in certain crucial ways such as its attitudes to religion, women's emancipation, the security of the party, activism, the personal affairs of members, organisational language and culture. Despite Soviet inspired rhetoric, in practice, the SCP was reconciled with local traditions and customs. Any customs or traditions that would foster their reach to the population, particularly farmers and workers, were endorsed, for example, such a custom was that of helping other people and the SCP encouraged the organising of cooperatives in work places where SCP members were to be found.

One of the sensitive issues was religion, particularly Islam. The SCP's stand on this issue was and is very clear. From its inception the SCP had clearly, and until now, unwaveringly held that the party adhere to a political, economic and social programme that is not against any religion whatsoever. Members of SCP who adhere to belief in Islam, Christianity or any other religion including African animism, can perform their rituals normally and participate in the SCP's activities and meetings. Atheism and belief or non-belief is regarded as a personal matter and the SCP did and does not interfere in it or call upon the member to change. The party's relation to Islam is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Recently, the Secretary General has said that the SCP is not a philosophical club, but a party with a programme, which struggles to build a new society. Although some right-wing activists have accused SCP members of being hypocritical, the SCP was and is very robust in punishing members who insult religion or insult a religious figure.

Other areas of potential conflict with customs and traditions are marriage and inheritance. Here, too, members usually adhere to traditional Islamic procedures. Party members may perform prayers, fasting and the party meeting would usually be adjourned to cater for this. Furthermore, since the dominant language is Arabic, the SCP utilizes it in its daily deliberations, communications, education etc. A communist member has to attend a weekly meeting in the work place and also in the party's branch in the appropriate residential area. For each there are different agendas concerning the field of activity. However, the two branches, work and residential areas, also have similar agendas when it comes to directives from higher organs in the party, financial contributions and organisational matters. As the party was and is self-financing, a member was and is expected to pay his/her dues monthly depending upon their income. The party has always attached high value to paying the monthly contribution on time. Another issue related to being a communist was and is to be

honest, particularly if a member was or is entrusted with a public office with financial or material resources. Institutions where communist members work have been largely immune from fraudulent behaviour. A member who is deemed dishonest would be dismissed after conducting a necessary internal investigation. Yet the security of the party was and is the top priority and most important task for all members and particularly the leaders.

Women's emancipation in this traditional society was and is a real challenge for the SCP. As indicated above the SCP was established, in alliance with democratic women and the Sudanese Women Union (SWU). The gender issue and the extent of women's freedom was and is always limited by customs, traditions and religion. For example, a woman member entering a marriage has to follow her family and/or tribal traditions. This had been so since the inception of the party and has continued until now. The emancipation of women was and is one of the most pressing issues and is usually internally discussed. The SCP propagates the policy of recruiting more women to its rank and file and also electing them to higher positions in the party structure. However, the number of leading women cadres was and still remains low. In consequence, women members have marginal representation in the party. The limited female membership of the SCP was and is almost confined to university graduates and students. The numbers overall have been estimated in the region of some hundred.

All members are required to live a life of commitment to the political, organisational and ideological line of the party. A member was and is expected to defend the party, disseminate party propaganda and follow the organisational directives of the party. Members were and are expected to join popular democratic organisations and trade unions. One issue that is of importance is the splits in the party. Up until now, the SCP has experienced more than five splits. Usually comrades who deserted the party were considered renegades and were labelled using Stalinist-Leninist terminology. Part of the dominant culture of the SCP was and is

defending the party. In particular, deserting members would suffer severe social isolation, and character defamation. Both the first and second secretaries of the party were severely attacked and described as "opportunist"¹⁸⁷. Their important contribution in leading the SCP during 1946 - 49 was not mentioned. This can be compared to the language used by both Lenin and Stalin in describing their opponents. As in the German KPD, a member of the SCP had and has to show a life of strong commitment. In addition to attending at least, two meetings per week: one in the residential area and the other at work, member has to participate in trade unions, youth organisations, rallies and leaflet distribution. In rural areas the member might engage in organising "Almidan Reading Groups". In such groups the SCP members try to attract the most promising citizens. Also, the members might organise cooperative societies in villages and administer them for the benefit of the whole community.

An important area of commitment to the party was and is paying the monthly membership fees. The SCP depended and still depends on membership fees and members could expect a 5% deduction from their wage or salary to finance its activities and pay stipends for its professional employees or cadres. In Sudan political parties have not been supported by the government. At one point in the 1960s, the SCP established companies to sell services and goods with the purpose of assisting the working class and also generating extra income. Unlike in Germany, France and Italy, these were a failure.

A further important area of SCP members' commitment from the foundation of the party onwards was the education of workers and farmers in town and villages. This continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Although the SCP was alleged to be representing the working class, in reality it was and is largely a white-collar party. Its membership consisted of

¹⁸⁷ Prof. F. M. Ibrahim, "Alhizb Alshiyoui Alsoudan wa aldawa Li Islah wa tatweer alahzab alsiyasiah" (SCP, call for Reform and Development of Political Parties) in Elzailace, op. cit. p. 274 - 323.

students, farmers, government and private sector employees and a few industrial workers. From 1946 to 1952 the total number of members was estimated around two thousand. In 1960s it was considered to have reached some 10 thousand with about an hundred women members. In the 1970s and 1980s the membership declined, due to the pervasive oppression practised by the Numeiri regime after 22 July 1971. Despite the small membership, the SCP was effective because it depended upon coalitions with trade unions and the popular organisations that it came into contact with. Moreover, its emphasis on tight organisation with cells at the core of a hierachical ‘democratic centralism’, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, is one important key to its success in extending influence far beyond a narrow membership. The SCP has never disclosed its real membership numbers, nor the number or identity of its underground professional cadres and members in the armed forces. The party always argues that party security is more important than the disclosure of its size. Compared with KPD's membership in the early years following its inception in 1919, which amounted to 106,656 out of a population of nearly 61 million, SCP membership did not exceed some five hundred in its early years. The population of Sudan was 1,126,000 in 1946 and most party members in lived in the towns and the capital city of Khartoum. In 1951 the total number of unionized employees was 37,793.¹⁸⁸ This shows how difficult it was for the SCP cadres to recruit industrial labour. Although the working class increased enormously in the 1970s and 80s, the SCP's ability to recruit and organise the vanguard of the labouring class was very weak. The life and work of party cadres is discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

In the Sudanese political arena, the SCP has had many enemies and the most fierce of them have been the Muslim Brothers. Established at the same time as the SCP, and also with

¹⁸⁸ A.H. El Jack, A. H. and C. Leggett, "Industrial Relations and the political process in the Sudan", Research Series No. 49, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva 1980, p. 11. Available at: <https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/17128/>

Egyptian influence, the Muslim Brothers fought fiercely against the communists. The Muslim Brothers succeeded in 1965 in bringing about the disbanding the SCP and the expulsion of its elected members from the parliament. Further, the Muslim Brothers' hostility towards the SCP continued steadily over the years, even when both parties were subject to repression. In June 1989 the Muslim Brothers, led by Hasan Alturabi and Omer Elbashier, perpetrated a coup and assumed power in Sudan. Since then the SCP cadres and members have been oppressed systematically and in January 2018 the leaders of the party were arrested and tortured for leading and organising protest against Muslim Brothers' regime. There were also other political parties that represented a threat to the SCP. These were the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party. The Ba'ath Party might be considered as coalition partner, though there were differences between the two parties. Regionally, the Gulf States and the various regimes in Egypt and Libya under Gaddafi were fierce enemies of the SCP. Gulf funds were channelled to Muslim Brothers to fight the SCP and to hamper the flourishing of democracy. In Libya, Gaddafi funded and trained the coalition of the Umma, Unionist and Muslim Brothers (called the National Front) in their fight against the left wing coup of 1969. After the 1971 massacre of the leaders of the SCP, the National Front invaded Sudan in 1976, but the regime was able to defeat them. Shortly after that in 1977 they signed a Reconciliation Agreement. According to this agreement the Muslim Brothers became part of Numeiri regime and remained so until March 1985.

2.13. The SCP and the Egyptian and Iraqi Communist Parties

I end this chapter with a brief section locating the SCP in relation to two relevant examples of Arab communist parties. As outlined above, Egypt was a main source of contact with communist ideas for Sudanese students. In Egypt a Socialist Party was established in 1920 as

part of the Second Communist International.¹⁸⁹ The party accepted Soviet conditions and changed its name to the Egypt Communist Party (ECP). After 1924 it is necessary to talk about the Egyptian Communist Movement, because the ECP split into many small groups. By 1960 there were 37 left groups. The ECP was the considered the mother party of all other groups. Like Sudan, Egypt was predominantly a country of agriculture with a system of strong feudal lords, who controlled land ownership, but with a royal family and formal parliamentary system controlled by Britain. The ECP depended at first on state and company employees. It focused upon organising workers in certain factories. I have not been able to discover any literature about the organisational structure of the ECP, nor does there seem to be any information about its underground apparatus and work. Its secret cadres were and are unknown.

The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was establish in 1934 which was during a period of Comintern domination and the ICP continued to play a prominent role in Iraqi internal politics and social struggle until the 1970s when it entered into conflict with ruling Ba'ath Party. The ICP had, for a short period, an armed organisation to fight against the Ba'ath regime but this did not continue for long (1980 - 1987). (Similarly, the SCP attempted to establish an armed front during the 1990s, this was in Eritrea and did not last long either). Like other Communist Parties established within the period of the Comintern domination, the party was loyal to the Comintern directives. However, as in Sudan, local politics and social struggles determined a lot of its policies, activities and tactics.

¹⁸⁹ Dr. Sami Atta Hassan, "The Egyptian Communist Party under Spotlight", Alswasana Newspaper, 04-12-2015, www.RaoufAbbas.org, accessed 20-07-2018. Also see, Ramadan, Hanan, "Communists in Half Century: Insiders Visions: From 1920 to 1965", Arab and African Research Centre, Cairo.

In the Iraqi case, as in Sudan, the ICP developed in a close social and economic environment in a society with backward production relations and a social system governed by tribal relations. According to Kazim Habib:

In Iraq there were strong relations with religious clergy within a poor peasant society. The country was characterized by unemployment, deprivation and a decline in the standard of living of the population, in addition to the absence of democratic rule under a fierce colonial domination." ¹⁹⁰

This was a situation that resembles Sudan's social and political environment in the period 1900–1956. Habib argues that the ICP benefitted from the general living situation of the various groups in society such as workers, peasants, farmers, artisans, students and intellectuals, as well as the interests of the middle and the working class.¹⁹¹ This situation was reflected in the introduction of practical slogans understood by poor and destitute people, as well as intellectuals. In comparing the ICP and SCP, Habib says, "The two Communist parties won a large number of intellectuals in both countries, because they were champions of freedom and democracy, intellectual freedom, and against colonialism and reactionary forces."¹⁹² In Iraq, Habib suggests, the relatively broad educated group played a distinctive and important role in **mobilizing the masses** for the party and the same thing happened in Sudan.

While the ECP remained an elite party, both the SCP and ICP were close to their constituencies. According to Habib, "The two parties at certain periods became close to the popular masses, although the strength of the two parties in terms of numbers was not great, but they were active, particularly in political life."¹⁹³ In Iraq, the ICP was able to mobilise the

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Kazim Habib, a leading ICP member.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² *ibid.*

¹⁹³ *ibid.*

masses and also gained a position among women while in Egypt the ECP remained suppressed during the whole period both by the nationalist Nasser regime, the Royal System and democratic regimes. These experiences resulted in the Egyptian party remaining underground, with no real contact with the people. The Egyptian Security Apparatus has remained very hostile to the party from its inception until now.

The freedom and rights of women in both ICP and SCP were one of the crucial agenda items in the political struggle. Both parties played a strong role in placing women's rights and freedom on the national agenda. This led to a fierce struggle particularly against traditional and Islamic political, social, religious and political enemies. Relatively speaking, both parties won the struggle and women's emancipation, although there were setbacks, particularly when political Islam began to play prominent political roles in the two countries.

Another crucial area of struggle for communist parties in the Arab World was and is religion.

In Iraq, as in Sudan:

The ICP did not tackle in its internal and public literature the subject of religion, and has shown respect for religious people. Although there is a provision in the party's rules of procedure that affirms the members' adherence to dialectical materialism, party members were free to worship as they will. Iraqi society is generally religious but has also been free to a fair extent, especially in the periods when the party grew up and in the period before the 1963 coup by the Ba'ath Party and the Arab nationalists against the national rule after the July 1958 Revolution.¹⁹⁴

When compared to SCP points convergence were often the same, however, due to the on-going siege exerted by Islamic parties, the SCP has always declared that communism was and is not meant to fight religion. The ECP has not disclosed any statement about their position on

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Habib.

religion. As in Sudan, ICP members usually adhere to social customs in marriage and death rituals. It is also highly likely that the ECP does the same since in all cases these are related to the social traditions and family customs of members.

All the three parties received aid in the form of scholarships, places of rest or treatment for illness and training of cadres in party schools in Eastern Bloc countries, especially the Soviet Union. The ICP had access to weapons in small quantities for its supporters.¹⁹⁵ SCP did not venture to establish an independent military arm all its life except after 1992. According to Habib and others, the arms assistance to ICP were neither conditional nor influential on the party's policy and approach.¹⁹⁶ Soviet influence of the party's policy and its positions did not stem from aid, but depended on the general attitude of the global communist movement. In this context the ICP and the ECP differed to some degree from the SCP, although the three parties supported the Soviets in its conflict with the Communist Party of China since all three considered the Soviet CP the mother party of the communist movement and the Soviet Union the first socialist country from which they could learn. The SCP adhered less to Soviet positions particularly in matters related to SCP domestic policies and it did not adopt all aspects of the Russian interpretation of Marxism or always follow their stand in international and local affairs. The other parties remained closer to the Soviet interpretation of Marxism and the ICP had good relation with Moscow according to Habib, AF and others.¹⁹⁷

2.14. Conclusion

As suggested above, until 1971 the SCP was widely considered, next to the South African Communist Party, to be the strongest and most broadly based communist party in Africa and

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Interviews with Kazim; AF, UF; and Salih Yasser.

the Arab world.¹⁹⁸ Many commentators considered the massacre of July 1971 of the leaders of the SCP as its end, but in 1986 the SCP contributed with other political and trade union activists to overthrowing the Numeiri regime. How the SCP survived the fifteen years after the massacre is a question always posed to the members and leaders of the SCP. This has much to do with the underground work that is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. After the 1989 coup the SCP lost many of its intermediate cadres due to migration or their seeking refuge in other countries. Also during the approximately 28 years of the Muslim Brothers' repressive regime, many of founding fathers and cadres passed away. During these years the SCP focused its activities within the student movement in universities and high secondary schools. The trade union movement had been totally incorporated into the system and its leaders were appointed by the regime. Old radical and independent union leaders were all arrested in the first days of the regime, tortured and after their release they were not allowed to assume their old positions. Despite all these difficulties, the party was able to convene its fifth and sixth conferences openly and elected its organs in 2009 and 2016. These conferences are indicators of the continuation of the SCP, despite the hostile climate and the party's shortcomings. In my research on the early development of the Sudanese Communist Party, I came across the striking fact that the early Sudanese communists were recruited by foreign communists. This fact reflects the international nature of the communism movement at that time. Whether in Sudan or in Egypt, many early communists were to some extent 'foreign made'. However, the founders adapted theory to their local conditions. This offered the SCP ways of contacting vast numbers of the population and helped it survive many dictatorial regimes as sympathizers protected the cadres. Although the SCP faced many challenges in its seventy years of existence, it developed continuously until the massacre of 1971. This was a devastating turning point, as the SCP lost the most prominent communist and labour leaders. Not only

198. Sudan Tribune News Web, "Sudanese Communist Party (SCP)" at: <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?mot319>, last accessed 23-04-2018.

that, but it also lost its strong army leaders in the Sudan Armed Forces. Another loss after the 1971 massacre was the trade union movement leadership; a strong partner of the SCP. Trade unions had been an excellent mobilising force that supported the SCP actions against dictatorial regimes' policies.

However, the party began again in the mid seventies to re-organise and re-gather. In 1985, the SCP played a central role in the ousting of the Numeiri dictatorial regime. In the next elections of 1986, the SCP won only three seats in the parliament. This was despite the fact that the party was very effective in calling for peace, fostering democracy, fostering the rule of law and equality between all Sudanese citizens. Also the party was able to establish alliances with other parties to deter the Muslim Brothers' political aspiration.

As suggested above, the SCP experience was and is very different when compared to the experience of European CPs. With a narrow proletarian base, lack of consciousness among the peasants and middle class urban dwellers, the SCP faced extra challenges. After the Muslim Brothers' coup of 1989, the SCP went underground for more than a decade. Members and leaders were imprisoned, tortured, fired from jobs and murdered. The majority of the middle cadre was able to flee the country. This flight was motivated by torture and prosecutions during the first ten years of the regime. Yet despite this, the party was able to convene its two congresses and announce some changes to its bylaws. However the congresses continued to emphasise their adherence to Marxism-Leninism. The SCP is nowadays in a weak condition, with very small membership and very limited financial resources. The declining influence of the SCP in the Sudanese political arena can be felt in recent years. Training opportunities are no longer available for cadres due to the fall of the

Eastern Bloc and today the SCP has to depend completely upon its own capabilities. Some of these issues are taken up in the conclusion to this thesis.

As outlined in Chapter 1, this research is to a large extent a case study that focuses on the SCP's strategies and tactics, its existence in a hostile, oppressive state, and its ability to root itself within the popular classes in a Muslim society that has hosted it and continues to host the SCP. The whole experience of the SCP, its internal structures, decision making process, the functions of different units and section which have never been discussed before are the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 3

The Sudanese Communist Party: Organisational Structure and the Development of Cadres

3. 1 Introduction

This chapter examines in greater details the organisational structure of the Sudanese Communist Party and the development of its cadres in the decades after its foundation in the 1940s until 2016. I argue that while the cadre constitutes the core of a Marxist-Leninist party, the SCP adapted its practices to accommodate specific Sudanese conditions. Drawing on oral interviews, I reconstruct the role of volunteer and professional cadres, and those who operated openly and underground. I detail how they were trained and integrated within the party and its culture. I address the role of the party specialist, for example in the departments running trade union policy, journalism, and work among youth and women. In laying out the organisational structures and practices of the SCP, I prepare the ground for detailed examination of underground work in Chapter 4.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the SCP was established by a small group of enthusiastic students, low level, white-collar employees and manual workers. It drew mainly on the model of the Egyptian Communist Party, incorporating Marxist-Leninist party structures but adapting them and focusing on local conditions while attempting to combine its own version of Marxism Leninism with Islam. As discussed in Chapter 2, Sudan was at this time an underdeveloped, agrarian British colony with low levels of literacy and little basic education. Indeed the establishment of the SCP marked a qualitative leap in the development of the social and political awareness of some sections of the Sudanese population in a traditional society, where

illiteracy was very high (70% until the mid-1970s) and education was largely restricted to religious school or what is called the *Khalwa*.¹⁹⁹

The process of establishing the party was always difficult. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the SCP faced, from its inception, different kinds of hostile responses from various quarters. These attacks were launched by rival political parties and by dictatorial governments ranging from the Colonial Administration to the three military regimes that between them were in power for more than 44 years. These undemocratic regimes launched and pursued hostile campaigns aimed at fighting communism and all forms of what were regarded as subversive activities. They persecuted, intimidated and imprisoned party members, and even executed SCP leaders. Despite all this, this small party survived and maintained its existence under very precarious conditions.

This has raised many questions. How could a progressive party, committed to socialist ideals and the development of the country be established and have survived in such a traditional, underdeveloped society? As outlined in Chapter 2, in the 1940s Sudan was a society where subsistence agriculture dominated. A Sudanese labour market, in the strict sense of selling labour power for wage, had developed after the Colonial Administration began to invest in Sudan. Yet in the 1940s the number of those who worked outside of agricultural was still very small in number and the workers involved had different loyalties (class consciousness). Both the Communist Party's own internal publications and my oral history research suggest that the commitment and organisation of the party cadres were crucial in building the communist party and in securing its continued existence.

¹⁹⁹ In the Khalwa children learn some arithmetic, poetry and reciting and memorising the Quran and Hadith.

In looking in detail at this area, this chapter examines what is an obscure and untouched aspect in the history of the Sudanese Communist Party. Available studies to date have focused on this history within the overall national struggle for independence. The internal structure of the party that I describe here, its constituencies and how it functions, have not previously been studied. The lack of scholarly work on the party's structure and practices meant that my task was particularly challenging since I had to draw predominantly on oral history interviews which could potentially be seen as opening my study up to accusations of being overly subjective or partisan. As explained in my methodology section in Chapter 1, I consulted a large range of interviews comparing and contrasting them and reading them against relevant party and external documents. This study focuses on a core group that sustained the existence of the party. My research faced another almost insurmountable hindrance: the absolute secrecy with which the party consistently treated its cadres. While this is understandable, given that for most of its history the party has had to operate underground, its effect was to produce a significant lack of information on questions relating to cadres and their day-to-day living. For these reasons and to answer many of these questions, this chapter focuses on the cadres and their role within the party.

3.2 The Objectives of the Party

The name SCP clearly suggests the end objectives of the party. Since its inception the party has been striving to convert Sudanese society, its social, economic and political system, to socialism and social justice. The party's constitution of 2009 defines its nature and objectives in Article (2) as follows: "It is a voluntary union between revolutionary activists committed to accomplishing the national democratic and socialist programme commensurate with the characteristics of the Sudanese people."²⁰⁰ This statement clearly suggests that the

²⁰⁰ See the SCP 2009 Constitution, Article (2).

Communist Party in the Sudan is not and has not been quite like communist parties in the West or in the Soviet bloc. Among the key characteristics of the Sudanese people is their rootedness in Islam.

As in other contexts, the party has depended upon the working class and potentially revolutionary sections of the whole population. This has meant leading alongside and in a non-hostile relation to a traditional Islamic culture. What is perhaps unique to the SCP is the organised and sympathetic capitalist section of the party. This group is called the revolutionary capitalist section and was long considered to be fully allied with the masses. As discussed in Chapter 2, the relationship of Sudanese communism to Marxism-Leninism as it is understood in Soviet or even Euro Communist models is at best partial and often contradictory. It serves as a guide rather than a dogma. In its own words, the SCP is “guided by the Marxist approach and theory.” Further the party is also guided by the:

Good heritage deeply rooted in us as Sudanese and springing from our Arabic and African belonging. Above all, based on real-life experience of Sudan and taking into account all the variables and the developments of the contemporary era.²⁰¹

The party defines its agenda as fighting all “forms of oppression and exploitation,” specifically it aims to abolish capitalist exploitation. In its own words, the party seeks to “promote justice in the distribution of wealth for the benefit of hard-working producers.”²⁰² As discussed in more detail in chapter 5, the party defines religion as a personal matter but it also stands against the use of religion in politics and to justify tyranny. For that reason, the SCP has had many members who are believers, predominantly Muslims, but also some Christians and Jews at the time when they still lived in Sudan.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

²⁰² *ibid.*

As outlined in Chapter 2, party membership developed from a small group of a few hundred in the 1940s to reach round 1500 in 1956, yet its influence far outweighed its membership.

According to Laqueur, this was due to the following factors:

As a result of clever leadership, hard work, devotion, a knowledge of the basic principles of political organization, and a strong will to power, the 1,500 Sudanese Communists have succeeded in infiltrating into many key positions. The other Sudanese parties have been deficient in most of these qualities.²⁰³

According to many authors, including Laqueur, the spread of the SCP was due to the failure of the successive governments to carry out their tasks efficiently, and the failure of other political parties to match the performance of the SCP. Laqueur argued in the 1950s that:

The further growth of communism in the Sudan depends mainly on the ability of the new government in Khartoum to cope with its tasks, and the ability of non-Communist parties to establish mass organisations and not let their differences of opinion paralyse the development of the country as a whole.²⁰⁴

In my opinion this remained true for a certain period in the history of Sudan. Until the 1960s, the SCP with its cadres and their high level of training and devotion, were able to spread communist ideas rapidly. In the 1960s, the SCP membership reached between 3 and 5 thousands and the SCP had a strong presence in trade unions, educational institutions, the military and in key positions in different public institutions. Further, the SCP has always worked in coalitions with sympathizers, drawing on youth, women and minorities in both residential and work places. This gave the party extra presence and enabled members to portray the party as huge. However, this ended dramatically after the massacre of 1971 and the party began from that date on to lose ground to the newly strong parties such as the

²⁰³ Laqueur, op. cit. p.69.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

Muslim Brothers. Today, the SCP membership does not exceed 10 thousand, in a total population of around 32 millions.

3. 3 The Party and Undemocratic Regimes

In the course of its history, the SCP faced three military dictatorial regimes (1958-1964, 1969-1985 and 1989-2005). Yet despite being persecuted and harassed, by these regimes, the SCP was able to survive. Since 2005 it has functioned within a limited margin of freedom.

According to observers and to its Secretary General, the party was able to survive due to its cadres.

After Independence, Sudan was governed by an elected democratic regime that remained in office for a short period from January 1956 to November 1958 when a military coup took place. The regime that came to power in the 1958 coup immediately banned all political parties and began to persecute and intimidate political activists. Among the victims were SCP leaders. The State Security Apparatus exerted great efforts to hunt out, monitor and persecute communist activists and to ban their public activities. During the period 1958-1964 the SCP's activists began a campaign of writing slogans on walls calling on the population to overthrow the regime. Also in this period, the SCP began publishing press releases and pamphlets about different political and economic issues. Internal circulars for members about domestic issues and external relations and issues were also very common at this time. Despite government suppression, the party survived these witch-hunting efforts and party members were victorious in the 1964 uprising in the sense that they led a wider coalition of political parties and trade unions and successfully removed the first military junta of Aboud. The coalition government included two of the most prominent communists in the trade unions movement:

El-Shafie Ahmed El-Sheikh, the secretary general of Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation (SWTUF) and Sheikh Al-Amin, the secretary of Gezira Scheme Farmers Union.

From 1964 there was a short period of democratic rule in Sudan that lasted until 1969 and ended in a new military regime. At first the Numeiri regime was allied with the SCP, but after a short honeymoon, the regime began to express its open hostility to the SCP and the conflict between the two escalated to end in the massacre of the SCP leadership in 1971.²⁰⁵ Between 1969 and 1971 the SCP had focused on an internal struggle within its cadre and that led to the split in the party. Elkhier relates how:

The military coup implemented in 1969 by Free Officers was the most devastating in the history of the SCP, due to the difference in opinion within SCP cadre over the position towards the coup. This led to a severe split within the SCP; some of the SCP leaders endorsed the action of what they called “The Revolutionary Movement of the Army” based on the progressive nature of the officers and their hostility towards sectarianism.²⁰⁶

The groups of cadre that supported the new regime were appointed as ministers.²⁰⁷ The same group supported the regime’s attempt to “ban and dissolve the SCP following the experience of Egyptian and Algerians Communists.”²⁰⁸ The other group that opposed the regime, actually had reservations about taking power through coups, and refused the idea of disbanding the party and called for the establishment of a national democratic front and they were persecuted as a result.²⁰⁹ After the split, the SCP’s major publications focused on the reasons for it.

²⁰⁵ As described in Chapter 2, the regime executed prominent party leaders including Abdelkhalig Mahjoub, the Secretary General, Alshafie A. El-Shiekh, a member of the Central Committee and Secretary General of the Sudan Workers Trade Unions, Josef Garang, member of the Central Committee; and several military officers who were members of the Party.

²⁰⁶ Sudan Top website, Dr. Ibrahim, O. Elkhier, “Nubzah aán Alahzab Alsiyasiah fi Alsoudan”(A Summary of the Political Parties in Sudan). <http://eymoo.sudanforums.net/t5-topic> (dated 04-04-2011), accessed 27-04-2018.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*

Moreover leaflets, pamphlets and some press releases also focused on fighting against the dictatorial regime at the time. The issues addressed by the SCP were diverse and interesting. For example, the SCP issued pamphlets against the peace accord of 1972. Also it advocated the unity of the opposition, called for the release of communist prisoners, and addressed issues of rising inflation, the political situation in the Arab Region, and the crises in other parts of the world.

After 15 years of dictatorship there was another Sudanese uprising in 1985, when the country regained democratic rule, but once again only for a short period. In 1989, a coup brought the Muslim Brothers to power. The old hostility against the communists broke out and the regime embarked on another round of witch-hunting activity against the SCP, including intimidation, persecution, torture. In the process some trade union cadres were even 'liquidated' for example Dr. Ali Fadul. Only in 2005, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Regime and the Sudan Liberation Movement, was the SCP able to work publicly.

During such periods of pervasive suppression and the detention of activists, the party concentrated its efforts on educational institutions, including the universities, and on the trade union movement. In the University of Khartoum and Cairo University, the SCP continued its activities among the students and was in direct contact with different political and social movements. From such institutions came also some of its cadre. The survival of the party can be attributed to the dedication of its professional cadres since they were able to preserve the existence and survival of the remaining leaders and to concentrate on rebuilding the party's shattered rank and file. The party's activities were limited to particular areas and institutions such as schools, universities and trade unions. The security of the party and its cadres played a

pivotal role during these years, affecting its public presence and representation. Many of the leaders were underground and they were not allowed to represent the party without strict permission from the party security apparatus. The security cadres, who carried out these duties, would evaluate the situation for the party as regards the security of the leaders and party more widely.

3.4 Defining the Cadre

In Marxist literature, the concept of a 'Cadre' is, to paraphrase Ernesto Che Guevara:²¹⁰

A person ... an individual who has achieved sufficient political development; can lead the masses and can perceive the signs manifested by the masses of their own desires and their innermost motivations. S/he is an individual of ideological and administrative discipline who can practice democratic centralism; has ability to evaluate the existing contradictions; knows how to practice the principle of collective discussion; the cadre person is creative, a leader of high standing, a technician with a good political level, who by reasoning dialectically can advance his sector of production, or develop the masses from his position of political leadership.

Mao Zedong wrote that it was the task of the party to train large numbers of new cadres in a planned way.²¹¹ He saw the cadres as a decisive factor once the party political line had been determined. Further, he states:

The criterion the Communist Party should apply in its cadres policy is whether or not a cadre is resolute in carrying out the party line, keeps to party discipline, has close ties with the masses, has the ability to find his bearings independently, and is active, hard-working and unselfish. This is what "appointing people on their merit" means.²¹²

²¹⁰ <http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1962/09/misc/x01.htm>

²¹¹ Mao Tse Tung, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War" (October 1938), *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 202.

²¹² *ibid.*

It is possible to see from these quotes that there was a strong measure of agreement across difference within the broader communist movement when it came to cadres. According to Che, an individual cadre should: 1. “Have ideological and administrative discipline. 2. Be someone who knows and practices democratic centralism. 3. Be someone who knows how to evaluate the existing contradictions using this method and to utilise fully its many facets.”²¹³ These three basic characteristics mean that the cadre should be well educated in Marxist theory and dialectical materialism. Furthermore a cadre should possess knowledge of how to “practice the principle of collective discussion and to make decisions on his own and take responsibility in production.”²¹⁴ The cadre must be “loyal to the party and Marxism and well developed physically and morally along with his ideological development in such a way that he is always willing to confront any conflict and to give his life for the good of the revolution.”²¹⁵

3. 5 The SCP and the Concept of Cadre

In this section I look at how the category of cadre functioned in the context of the Sudanese Communist Party. Cadre played a central role throughout the history of the SCP. The first professional cadre began his task in 1948. According to Article 22 of the SCP Constitution of 2009, cadres played a pivotal role in the party’s “growth, development and the expansion of its influence.”²¹⁶ This document further describes the cadres as those who had preserved the existence, survival and sustainability of the SCP over the years.²¹⁷ It says further that to achieve the party’s objectives, the cadres should be taught, educated and undergo an educational programme.²¹⁸ Among the Central Committee’s tasks are the planning of an

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ SCP Constitution 2009, Article 22.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Op. Cit.* Section 2.

educational programme for the cadre and to distribute it within the party. And further, the cadre should receive theoretical and practical training according to an annual plan.²¹⁹

The SCP describes the cadre as “the backbone of the party”.²²⁰ According to the SCP, a cadre or its member belonging to the core group, once trained can assume control. S/he can train and lead others. Furthermore, s/he must be indoctrinated and this is exactly what a cadre in the literature and the practice of the SCP means. A cadre can be characterised by the following attributes. He or she should be:

- Professional
- Well trained
- Indoctrinated and have high level of political and ideological development
- Specialised in certain area of activities
- Specially elected and selected to perform certain duties

Party literature specifies that the length of office depends on the party's needs and the cadre's ability. When we look at the SCP cadres, whether public cadres or non-public cadres, we can observe that a cadre has a specific domain and area of specialisation, depending on a specific division of labour. The SCP has different sorts of cadres and there are two broad main categories:

- The open public cadres;
- The underground and disguised cadres.

These two broad categories are core divisions within the SCP.²²¹ Each cadre will be potentially classified from the first day of being member. That means the branch or a higher organ will decide, after reviewing the member's certain characteristics, whether to assign the

²¹⁹ SCP Constitution 2009, Article 22.

²²⁰ The Constitution, Article 21. Also see the Cadres Series, all in Arabic.

²²¹ Cadres Series Studies, published by the SCP at www.almida.net (all in Arabic).

member as a public or underground cadre. This broad division is further divided into specialisations. The open public cadres consist of: Political, Trade Union, Information, Journalistic, Student, Women, Youth, Minority, Peace and Solidarity and Public Organisations cadres.

The cadres can also be viewed from the angle of professionalism. This divides the cadres into:

1. The volunteer professional cadres;
2. The in-between professional cadres; and
3. The full-time professional cadres.

1. The volunteers are cadres are those who acquired training, education, political and ideological development to assume a leading position in the party, but they are not fully employed by the party. This group volunteers to carry out the tasks allocated to them by the party organs. For example teaching different subjects to the nominated members, or lecturing about certain issues related to political development, or providing consultancy to a higher organ of the party such as legal or economic advice or advice on other matters. They are employees in both the private and public sectors. 2. The in-between cadres are members who are hired by the party for a short period of time to carry certain tasks. They must also meet all the criteria above.

3. The professional, highly trained, cadres working full time. These professionals are full-time employees of SCP. They are and were selected according to experience, education, ability to perform tasks, their social background and political development. Professional cadre education is subject-specific i.e. related to the subject of the mission. These professional cadres receive a monthly salary from the SCP.

Usually the general public know those who are open public cadres and they are often regarded as highly moral and very intelligent politicians and leading figures in the struggle against dictatorial regimes. On the other side, some sections of the population consider a communist cadre as someone devilish who should be fought. My oral history research suggests that generally speaking the people with whom the cadre comes into contact tend to show great respect for them, although they may not support the party line.

The total number of the full-time professional cadres is one of the secrets of the party. Furthermore, the ratio between public and underground cadres is also unknown. However, the whole apparatus of cadres probably does not exceed a hundred members. The functioning of the cadres is completely dependent upon the organizational structure of the party, and the place of the specific organ within the party's structure and as well its role in communication with the people. The organisational structure of the party provides a general idea of the organisation of these cadres. Here below is a diagram of the organisational structure of SCP.

3.6 The SCP's Organisational Structure

1		General Assembly Meeting: every 4 years				
2		Central Committee: 2 meetings annually				
3 Political Secretariat/Politburo Meeting: weekly meetings						
4. Specialised Offices		Organisational		External Relations		Security
		Economic Studies		Financial		Students
5		Provinces Leading Offices				
Kordofan		Khartoum	Darfur	Gezira		Eastern Province
Northern		Nuba Mountain	Southern	Blue Nile		

6. Cities and towns leading Committee				
Town Leading Office			Leading Office for a group of villages	
7		Leading office group of cell		
8	Cell max. 7 members	Cells	Cells	Cells

Below is an explanation how this structure functions and the way the lower cells control the upper leading offices and committees.

A look at the organisational structure of the SCP throws light upon the stories told by the cadres that I interviewed and their role in difficult situations. The force behind this structure is the responsibility taken on by members to protect and secure the unity, security, and safety of the party and simultaneously, its presence among the people. The SCP is governed by a programme and by-laws called the constitution.²²² These two documents are usually issued by the highest authority in the party, i.e. the General Assembly. The last Constitution was issued in 2009 by the Fifth General Assembly held in Khartoum. The by-laws govern the functioning of the different organs of the party from the highest organ to the lowest one, including individual members. They define the party, members' rights and duties, the structure of the party, how discussion and dialogue will be carried out and resolved, centralised democracy, and how to resolve intellectual conflicts. In contrast to the constitution, the Party Programme is an analysis of the current phase of development of the country with a proposed plan of action to convert the country into a developed one according to the party's objectives as regards socialism and social justice. The programme analyses the economic phase of the

²²² See the following website of the SCP: <https://sudancp.com/index> The constitution of the SCP party (in Arabic).

society, political power and the party's approach and programme for desired changes. Based upon such analysis the party will advocate certain policies. For this chapter the by-laws are the most important since they allow me to delineate the whole structure of the party and go deeper into defining the tasks of each entity in the party.

3. 7. The Structure of Branch or Cell

The SCP was influenced by Leninist and Stalinist dictates on the organisation of the party. As one can discern from the organisational structure, the party was and is a Leninist organisation under a Sudanese national cloth. The SCP strives to build cells in residential areas and in work places. The cell, also called a 'branch', is the lowest, most basic element in the structure of the party. It consists minimally of three members and may extend to more than five. According to the availability of enough members, the branch must be formed in both work and residential areas. A member in a work branch must also join the residential area branch. Therefore, a member has to attend the weekly meetings of both branches.²²³

At times when the party is not being hunted down by the regime, the branch or cell can have more than five members. This may even extend to reach twenty. During dictatorial regimes the cell will be confined to seven members. After this point the cell will be divided into two. Each member in the branch has a specific function, the division of labour within a branch/cell, will be tackled below under the heading "How the basic unit functions". A group of branches comprises a unit and elects a leading office. A group of offices will elect either the town leading office or a sector leading office.

²²³ See the Constitution of the Party, Chapter IV, Article 14.

3. 8 The Higher Organs

From the branches on the ground, the structure gradually rises to culminate in the General Assembly as the highest authority. When the General Assembly is not convened, the Central Committee (CC) is the highest authority.²²⁴ Members of the Central Committee meet twice a year in normal situation. In case of dictatorial regimes the Central Committee meets once per year. If there is an extraordinary situation then a meeting will be held. While the Political Secretariat (Politburo), will meet regularly, approximately weekly. Other higher organs will meet according to their specific agenda and the situations they confront.

The hierarchy of the party is organised according to the type of sector. The rule is that the party must be represented both in work and residential areas. Depending on residential, educational, work and production areas, the party will be built from different branches and cells. Each group has to elect its own leading officers (executive committee). A large group of leading officers may elect a leading sector committee. Further, for residential areas, the towns in a province will elect a province committee. Each of these elements has its own structure and organisation. This organisational structure is replicated from the branch to the Central Committee.

Most of the political officers will be elected to represent their branch in a higher organ such as the residential area committee. The political officer is also a spokesperson of the branch. Other officers, especially the organisational officers have their special higher organ where they work together for the sector or whole town. Most of the organisational officers are disguised and undercover cadres. The branch is supposed to have its own independent strategy, within the overall party strategy. The branch must have a local organisational

²²⁴ According to the Party Constitution, the General Assembly will be convened every two years.

classification list of the area in which it is active. Further, the branch has to collect financial contributions from members, and contributions and donations from friends, and send them to the higher organ.

Similar organisational charters are created at the level of the town and the provincial offices. At these levels, the organisational charter represents accumulated consolidated charters of different Branches and units. Even in the highest organ, the Central Committee, the same structure prevails. Here the Secretary General plays the pivotal role and leads the whole party, while other officers also have higher functions compared to the lower organs. Most of these officers should have strategic planning capacities, be more competent in Marxism, experts in various fields of knowledge, have work experience and have a high level intellectual powers.

The branches and residential areas offices each have a weekly meeting. The town and provinces also hold their meetings weekly. The Central Committee will meet three times a year or if the need arises may be summoned to convene a meeting to address certain issues.²²⁵ All these meetings and organisational activities are affected by the prevalence of state repression. The Secretariat of the Central Committee is responsible for leading the party until the next Central Committee meeting. The Secretariat comprises the Secretary General, Organisational, Financial and Political Secretaries and any others deemed necessary. The higher officers and the leaders are considered the most professional cadres of the party. Therefore, they must be protected from security threats i.e. from the state security during a dictatorial regime. The functioning of the SCP as an underground movement, since its inception in 1946, with very short periods of democratic rule, where the party functioned openly, has gives these cadres a legendary character. Some of the professional cadres were

²²⁵ The Constitution, Article 17.

appointed or selected by the Political Secretariat to become part of higher organs, particularly in periods of pervasive repression. However, not all professional cadres were members of higher organs such as the Central Committee. Founding members such as the late Algizoli was a member from the establishment of the party until he passed away in 2011.

Alongside this hierarchy, the party also has special organs. These special organs were created to address certain issues, for example the Economic Committee, the Trade Union Fractions, and other entities. These specialised organs consist of specialised cadres. The Economic Committee, for example, will consist of people who have specialised in economics. In addition, the SCP had paid attention to the organisation of women and students. For these two groups the party established special secretariats to tackle affairs and issues related to them. Working in a specialised organ of SCP depends upon the cadre's capabilities and knowledge of the tasks assigned to this targeted organ. For example, Suliaman Hamid was the organisational secretary and had attended many training sessions inside Sudan and in the Eastern Bloc. An excellent trade unionist such as Mahjoub Sid Ahmed was selected to be a member of the Trade Union Fraction, which is specialised in trade unionism.

Of special importance is the close tie that the SCP has developed with the Peasants' and Workers' organisations. In each trade union or popular organisation there are what is called a fraction. The fraction consists of communists who are members within each organisation. So in the workers trade unions there was and is a special fraction where communist members would discuss the SCP programme, the performance of members in the trade union and other matters such as coalition with certain social or political organisations. The fraction will report to the leading organ. The same was also true for farmers. Also, in the armed forces, before the massacre of 1971, there was a fraction of communist officers and other rank and ordinary

soldiers. This has remained dissolved since 1971. These three groups received special attention from the Central Committee. However, this relationship became difficult after 1971 with the incorporation of the three organisations under the Sudanese Socialist Union (a State Party established by the Numeiri Regime). This state political party was established by the regime and controlled all political, trade union, youth and women organisations. This continued until 1985 when the regime was overthrown and its political control was dissolved.

3.9 The Secrecy of the SCP

When SCP was established in 1946, the founding members chose to function underground, which means outside the law, which is an obstacle to public activity and development.²²⁶ A possible explanation may be the impact of earlier movements in Sudan that struggled against the colonial regime. Underground activities, since the party's inception, have influenced SCP development and the development of its cadres. The party has lived most of its life under the shadow of secrecy except in 1965, when it acquired the right to organise publicly after the revolution of October 1964 and again during 1985 to 1989, after the uprising of April 1985. At this time the SCP regained its legitimacy after the signing of the Nivasha Agreement in 2005.²²⁷

The secrecy required in an underground movement influenced the education and selection of leading cadres to fill certain higher functions in the party or perform public functions. The process of creating cadres was very complicated and depended upon many factors. These included the intellectual and political development of a member, and his or her knowledge of theoretical Marxism and its application. This was the most important criterion. In addition, the member's performance would be observed in the branches and other organs. Of importance

²²⁶ Party Constitution, p. 2 available at http://www.midan.net/?page_id=49

²²⁷ *ibid.*

here is whether the member complies with the party's by-laws, pays the monthly contribution, and executes the tasks allocated by the given organ. When a member becomes intellectually and practically active, the chance will be great to be promoted to higher organs.

The SCP organises schools or education for nominated cadres. A Cadres' School is a short course or programme with specific aims and is result-oriented, aimed to develop certain a knowledge base and the capacity of the cadre. It is usually organised by higher organs. In these educational programmes the nominated members will be taught a specific subject related to their mission or new function. The Cadres' Schools are subject-specific and tackle only one issue at a time, related to the mission or function of the selected cadres. During undemocratic regimes these schools were organised underground. The secret knowledge of these schools and the place where they were organised was confined to the enrolled cadres. The rest of the party would be notified after the successful completion of such school. During democratic regimes, these schools were open and organised in the Party's Headquarters in Khartoum or its seats in the provinces.

3. 10 How the Smallest Units Function

In the first meeting a member attends, he or she will select a secret name, a pseudonym. Thus, within the branch each member has a secret, underground name from the first day after joining the party as full member. Further, each member is allotted a certain function within the branch. In total, the basic functions are: the Political, Organisational, Financial, and Cultural Officers. Other functions may also be added if there is a need for this. Under normal conditions each of these officers has a defined role in the functioning of the party at this level. Other functions may be created according to conditions. Each branch or cell also may have a cell for newly recruited/nominated members. The branch is then responsible for organising an

educational course (called usually “the nominated school”) to teach them the basics of the party strategy and Marxism.

In organising the meetings, a specific agenda will be put forward. This agenda is predefined and well known to experienced members. A typical agenda of a meeting will consist of: organisational issues, messages from the Central Committee, political issues, financial issues and tasks to follow up or to be allocated to members. If the branch has to supervise a “Nominated school”, this will also be added to the agenda and its performance must be followed up. In work places the trade union will be added as an agenda point. Other agenda points related to the function and performance of the branch among certain groups will be agenda issues. Under the agenda point “organisational issues”, the members will discuss issues related to organisation, security, messages from higher organs, and printed materials brought to the branch for distribution in its domain. Under the financial agenda item, members will discuss the monthly financial contribution of members along with contributions collected by members from friends and sympathisers. Under the political and Central Committee agenda point, the members will focus on the political situation, directives of the Central Committee and the tasks to be implemented by the branch’s members. Finally the tasks agenda item focuses on the duties each member will perform in the coming days before the next meeting. At the next meeting this will be followed up. A member who does not perform his or her tasks without a convincing excuse will be punished with critique, self-criticism, a reprimand, or suspension in case of accumulated non-performance.

To secure a meeting the members must agree upon a security question that answers the question: what is the reason that brought them together? If the meeting is scheduled to begin at five and all members are present except one member who is absent without an apology, or

information, the meeting may be adjourned. This can happen if there are strong indications or suspicions that something has gone wrong. The adjourned meeting should immediately leave the place of meeting. This will be done according to certain prescribed arrangements. The most important party member, whose secrecy must be protected, is the Organisational Officer. S/he is the archive, the minutes' preserver, the securer of the branch. The Organisational Officer will be the first to arrive and leave when the party is working underground. By guaranteeing the security of the Organisational Officer, the branch will preserve its secrets, its plans and members. After the Organisational Officer, the second to leave the meeting place will be the person who is most unknown to the state security and police and has no detention record. The rest of members will leave after that.

3. 11 The Cadres and the Party: A General View

While the cadres of SCP have come from different backgrounds, most of them have been middle class or petty bourgeoisie, educated and urban residents. In modern production facilities in rural areas there are also some cadres. Unfortunately there are no statistics available and all information is considered as classified. The social background of the most cadres reflects the social structure of Sudanese society, i.e. that the Sudan was and is still an underdeveloped country where labour consciousness is still rudimentary. This has affected the SCP's endeavour to be the party of the masses. SCP claims to be representing the masses, but labour and peasants form almost less than one third of its Central Committee and less than 10% of its members. Furthermore, the party depends upon a very small group of educated elites to lead its work. Although, the first parliamentary African woman was Sudanese i.e. Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim elected in 1964, still the number of the women in the SCP is very limited.

The SCP always stresses its rejection of elitism and directs members to be in touch with the general public; however, this endeavour has not taken the party beyond the position of being confined to the educated among women, men and a few workers. For years, the party has striven to recruit as many workers as possible into its ranks. While Sudan lacks heavy industry facilities, potential worker party members are to be found in the service, transport and agricultural sectors. In its endeavours to reach all parts of Sudan, the SCP was active in regions such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and the Northern and Eastern regions. It also tried unsuccessfully to establish itself in South Sudan, before separation. These activities required the availability of suitable cadres who could easily and unidentifiably carry out their work among the rural population. Such efforts need extra endeavours from the SCP to raise, educate, and train cadres. Usually the cadres come from the same areas or background.

3.12 The SCP's Military Cadres.

In its earlier years, the SCP had exerted efforts to establish a strong organisation within the security and armed forces. Not much information is available about this organisation. However, it is generally known that the SCP established the Free Officers' Organisation in the Armed Forces, which was a coalition between communist officers and democratic elements in the army.²²⁸ There was also an organisation for other ranks and ordinary soldiers but there seems to be no information about it. According to Osman Al-Kuda²²⁹: "The work of Sudanese army officers was handled by Abdelkhalig Mahjoub, the General Secretary of SCP. As for the work among the officers of other ranks and soldiers, the task was assigned to Abdulqader

²²⁸ The Free Officers' Organisation was established as part of the Leninist doctrine held by communists that any revolutionary movement needs a source of armed support.

²²⁹ Osman Al-Kuda, was a former soldier and member of the communist cell in the Sudan Armed Forces. He is famous for his role in the 19 July 1971 communist coup as he was commissioned with the task of protecting and securing the safety of Abdul Khalig Mahjoub before his escape from prison inside a Military Post in Khartoum. Osman was a member of the Communist Party.

Abbas, known as Abdulqader Tomsah (Crocodile)."²³⁰ It is clear from this account that working among the Army was considered a top priority and had been assigned extra attention.

The Free Officers' Organisation had its cells in different branches of the armed forces i.e. the police, the security and prison guards. The organisational structure of the communist organisation in the army had a similar structure to civilian branches. The cell would consist of not more than five members. Each member would know only those with him in the cell and each cell had a political, organisational, financial and cultural secretary.²³¹ According to Al-Kuda, the way cells worked in the army was a very sensitive issue that was affected by the security and safety of the members. This was reflected in the supervised meetings of cells. The SCP Security Office, a central organ led by the Secretariat, always organised and followed meetings closely. Abdul Jalil Othman was the central security officer and supervised all the meetings and attended them. He would plan the meeting in advance and guard it with weapons until it ended. He was responsible for identifying, locating and securing meetings. According to Al-Kuda, "No meeting could be held within military units as this was prohibited. Places for meetings were identified in very specific houses."²³² The organisation was very active within the armed forces during 1950's and 1960's but was dismantled in 1971 when Numeiri executed its leaders and imprisoned the rest of the group. Among those executed were Brigadier Babikr Alnour, Mahagoub Talga, Hashim Alata and Abu Shiba.²³³ During its activities it issued a small bulletin called the "Soldier" which was distributed

²³⁰ Interview with Osman Al-kuda.

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ Brigadier Babikr Alnour was the leading communist officer. When the Coup of July 1971 occurred, he was with Farouk Hamada Allah, also an officer in the Free Officers' Organisation, in London. Their plane was hijacked by the Gaddafi Regime and they were arrested and delivered to the Numeiri Regime which returned to power after three days. They were immediately executed. Hashim Alatta was the actual leader of the July 1971 coup. He was also executed. Abu Shiba was the Republican Guard leader and underground communist cadre. He was famous for providing a secret hiding place to the Secretary General Abdel Khalig Mahjoub during the period of the dispute between the SCP and the Numeiri Regime. He was also executed with many others.

among officers and non-commissioned officers as well as secretly distributed to people identified for recruitment.²³⁴

3.13 The Cadres: Specifics

As said earlier, the cadres are divided into different categories according to their function.

Two main divisions can be distinguished:

1. The open public cadres:
2. The underground and disguised cadres.

Public cadres are those representing the party in their contact with the public, meaning that they are well known to the general public as SCP members. Among these we find the politicians, leading trade union members, and discussion group members. Some of these are volunteer professionals and some of them are full-time professionals. The other group is kept totally underground, full-time and professional. The most important of these cadres are the organisational cadres responsible for the security of the whole party. Among them are those who are responsible for the archive, keeping stock of all the possessions of the party and the printing, publishing and machinery staff, including the technicians who repair the machines. Also they include such groups as transport and transfer cadres, specialized in transporting cadres, papers, possessions and materials and keeping them safe. As said earlier each cadre has followed a certain training programme or school where s/he received education and training.

3.14 The Cadres' Schools

Ever since the establishment of the party in 1946 and as part of its tasks, the Central Committee has planned how to train and educate the party cadre. To perform this task the

²³⁴ Al-Kuda Interview.

SCP organises different schools to educate members including its selected cadres. As mentioned above, the term school refers to a training course or educational materials given to the intended group for educational and practical purposes. First and foremost among them is the “Nominated Members School”. This is the basic unit administered by the branch or branches in a certain area, under the supervision of the Central Educational Office. In this school the new recruits will be taught the basics of Marxism, the History of the Party, the Constitution of the Party, Political Coalitions, Political Economy, Socialism and current issues. Within the Marxist course of study, new recruits will be taught dialectical materialism, economics, socialism, and planning. The Constitution of the party will be broken up into two lectures, one on the programme and the other on the by-laws. This course is crucial and should be followed by all nominated members and re-admitted members i.e. member who were expelled but then allowed to return as members.

After three months and an evaluation of his or her performance in understanding theory, practice and the other topics and courses delivered, a nominated member will graduate. A nominated member will be supervised, evaluated and accordingly be recommended for full membership. Practice means her/his activity among the people, adherence to the party’s line and the execution of the task allocated to him or her in meetings. Members who do not pass the course, will be given extra time to improve their performance and then be promoted. This is exactly the Leninist model of a communist party. Indeed the SCP fully adopted the Soviet model here and applied it in the light of Lenin's and Stalin's theorising.

Other schools are also organised for higher-level cadres. These are mostly of short duration. A school of this kind will deliver a one-subject course to the cadres. This will be an intensive course. The cadres, after completing the course, are supposed to be able to perform their

functions and tasks immediately. The party organised many in-house schools for certain type of cadres. For example, trade unions cadres, economic cadres, women cadres, and many others specifically related to certain issues. During democratic regimes, the party publicly organised such schools and the attendance was always high. During the existence of the Eastern Bloc, the SCP also made use of the possibilities of sending certain members to follow Cadres' Schools in countries such as the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. This included organisation, economics, materialism and other related Cadres Schools. The party benefited from such schools and was always encouraged to send members. However, the most important aspect in sending members to outside schools was the security of participating members.

3.15 The Fractions and Their Role

Communist members in a public organisation, such as trade unions, youth organisations, women's and peace organisations, would come from different branches and organs. They would meet as elected members of these organisations. At the same time, they would be members of SCP. To avoid double the work, to facilitate reporting to SCP and to follow up the activities of members and the course of action in these organisations, the SCP established 'fractions'. A fraction is an organisational unit of cadres created by the communists to discuss the strategy and tactic of the party in the specific organisation. Because the members might come from different branches or places, they would meet together to exchange experiences, and thoughts and to discuss how to remain within the organisation and the possibilities of recruiting new members, or lobbying among non-communist members of the organisation.

3.16 Passing Information

Information plays a pivotal role in the activities of the SCP. It is very complicated to pass on information within the SCP. Even under a democratic regime, this is not a straightforward issue because the information itself is divided into two important parts, depending on the sort of information that you want to pass to others. This is especially important under dictatorial regimes where the banning of the SCP has been the order of the day. The members and organs have had to find means to pass a piece of information safely to other members. There are different channels through which to pass it on, as well as to collect, information. Information intended for public use can be passed directly to members, while internal information (organisational information) will be passed through specified channels. The channels should be highly secure and protected against infiltration, even where information intended for the public is concerned. The carrier of the information will be chosen according to the degree of sensitivity, importance of information and/or if the higher organs wish to open a discussion or dialogue over this. For example, a letter from the Political Office of the Central Committee will be treated with utmost care and protection. After a thorough discussion of its content, a summary of the discussion and any suggestions will be sent to the higher organ. Members are encouraged to discuss such letters. Also, there are certain specific channels through which to pass certain internal information. Internal information concerning, for example, the transfer of a member from one town to another will be sent via organisational channels, while a political release or circular may be published in the newspaper or sent via the political organ. Such separation between the organisational and non-organisational matters has preserved the security of the party and its cadres.

When it comes to warnings about certain dangers or if an imminent danger is expected, members will be warned individually. In the case of publications the arrangements are highly secure in order to make things easier. When the party publishes some communiqué or release of information, it will be published in a certain house. From this house the publications will be transported to a station house where it will be held for a certain time. It will then be transferred to another house where it can be handed over to the carrier. The carrier will take the publication to a responsible sector officer who will deliver it to the organisational officers who will give it to individual members, who are supposed to either read it or disseminate it to the public. Not every piece of information is printed; sometimes it is only verbal. In such case one member will be contacted and s/he is instructed to either contact all members or a specific member.

3.17 Concluding Remarks

The structure, functioning and activities of SCP cannot be separated from the general economic, political and social conditions in the Sudan. The long periods of dictatorial regimes have directly affected the strength and spread of the SCP. The branch is the basic unit and is crucial in the contact between the party and the public. The structure of the branch is replicated in all other organs of the party. The General Assembly as the highest authority in the party, should be held every two years, however, due to suppression, the party has held only five assemblies in sixty years.

The SCP cadres differ according to function within the party and in the public domain. They come from different social backgrounds and have different levels of education. The SCP cadres were and are very important and they are crucial to preserving the security and sustainability of the Party under very difficult conditions. The SCP, from its inception in 1946

until now has depended on both full time and volunteer professional cadres to keep the party in existence in harsh, communist-hunting conditions. These cadres can be described as men and women of courage and dedication.²³⁵ More details of the lives of cadre working in the underground are discussed in chapter 4.

The notion of professional cadres was a Leninist concept and applied in many communist parties worldwide. Sudan was no exception. If we compare the party with the Soviet model of organising the masses, the SCP was in terms of structures a carbon copy of this model, however day-to-day practice was adapted to Sudanese culture and religion. Further, the methods of handling different organisational and intellectual disputes within the party followed the Stalinist model. While Sudanese culture has a saying: "Opinion and intellectual disputes, do not destroy amicable relations," this was not adhered to in intellectual disputes within the party and the party leaders would use Leninist terminologies such as: opportunist, bourgeois etc. to describe their critics. Furthermore, the former member who had left the party for ideological reasons would be socially isolated. Sometimes the cadres themselves would have a minimal knowledge of Marxism, but were and are professional in their function. This is the weakest point in the organisation of the SCP and it impacted on the SCP, particularly when such cadres had been introduced by a leader who then deserted the party.

²³⁵ I also have made use and read some of the Cadres Series of Lectures: "The Problems of Organizational Activities of the Party", various issues (all in Arabic).

Chapter 4

The Underground World of the Sudanese Communist Party

4.1 Introduction

Writing about underground activities, or disappearance as it is usually termed in the verbal culture and discourse of the Sudan Communist Party (SCP), is like writing about magic and the unseen. This life is fascinating, unimaginable, and calls for compassion and sympathy, but it is also undocumented, often dangerous and always unsafe. I am referring here to cadres' voluntary disappearance in order to carry out certain functions and tasks. In contrast to normal members, the underground cadres do not appear in public. They cannot talk about the SCP, its policy, or any other activity in public. They may even disguise themselves as an enemy of the SCP. No one among the real underground cadres wishes to release any of the party underground's secrets to people who might wish to know more about this phenomenon. They do not even talk about certain historical events that happened to the SCP when the underground cadres played a pivotal role. They have their own conventions about this. "We may need to use all we know and put these practices into use once again."²³⁶ Their lives and the conditions under which they work, as well as the penalties of being caught, have earned them the right to be silent.

Written material about underground activities is scant. At one point in 1982, a cadre who had deserted the party wrote "Six Years Underground" and delivered the manuscript to the Sudan

²³⁶ An Interview with the Secretary General, published in <http://sudaneseonline.com/msg/board/331/msg/1291496514/m/9.html>, accessed 18 February 2018.

Archive, but the manuscript disappeared after a few months.²³⁷ Even in the organisational circulars and publications, details of underground activities are not fully accounted for. A 'normal' member will know only his/her unit or cell for a long period of time, until it is safe for him/her to be exposed to the other underground members of the cadre groups.

Until now next to nothing has been written about the underground life of the SCP cadres, I have depended on interviews with some of the cadres who went through this process and their stories. In writing this chapter I drew on interviews with some still active cadres, but not with underground agents; with cadres who had left the SCP. I also used a focus group consisting of informants who lived or worked for years with underground cadres. These experiences were narrated to the researcher who checked the stories against the historical events and interviews with other cadres who had released some information about this subject. In the interviews I asked the following questions:

How were such cadres chosen?

How did they spend their day?

What were their daily activities?

Where did they hold their meetings?

What kind of support did they receive from the SCP?

What kind of support did they receive from the people who were accommodating them?

When did the first cadre in your cadre group go underground occur? Why?

Had the underground cadres certain ranks?

Who was qualified to be selected for different spheres of activity?

²³⁷ Omar Mustafa Almekki, "Six Years Underground 1958-1964" Series of articles in Almidan newspaper Almekki was the Chief Editor of Almidan, the daily newspaper of SCP, and he left the SCP after the 1970 great split. He worked as Director in an insurance company. He died in 1987.

In addition to this I also compared their standard of living with their counterparts in governmental services who shared the same level of education. Further, I posed the question: “Is it possible to do this job without the support of the people?” And finally I looked at some amusing situations they confronted and their results.

4.2 Background

Like other Sudanese political parties, the SCP was established in 1946 when Sudan was governed by the Colonial Administration. As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, at that time political activities were forbidden and after the abortive revolt of 1924 against the colonial power, the few educated elites focused their efforts on social and literary club activities. The Sudanese political parties such as the Umma and the Unionists²³⁸ were supported by the Ansar and Khatmiya religious sects respectively. They were led by the Al-Mahdi Family and the Mirghani Family respectively.²³⁹ These two parties attracted the educated elites who were eager to enter the political arena, but did not have sufficient money to run their activities. These two families provided these elites with financial resources, but also controlled them. In contrast to these, the SCP was established by young people who upheld new ideas. Beside the SCP, there were also other new parties, the most important of which was and is the Muslim Brothers which was also established mainly by young people to fight what their leaders called communist thought “invasion” (‘brainwashing’).

²³⁸ The Umma Party and Unionist Party are the two largest political parties of the Sudan. As outlined in Chapter 2, both were established in 1945 during the era of colonial rule and both parties continued to use religion as a base and ideology.

²³⁹ The Mahdi Family are descendants of Mahdi, a Sudanese Sufi, who led the Revolution of 1885 and expelled the Turko-Egyptian Rulers from the Sudan. The Mirghani Family is a Sufi family, their grandfather was a clergyman who taught Quran and had a wide network of supporters in the Eastern, Northern and Khartoum Provinces.

From its inception, the SCP had underground cadres. They worked actively underground, which meant that in order to be selected for this role, they had to fulfil certain criteria: dedication, basic knowledge of Marxism, patience, stamina and self-sacrifice. Some of them were even leaders in other political parties, or leading civil servants or army officers. Others worked as day labourers. They might live in the towns or in very remote areas. Some of them might be on the move for six months at a time, travelling from one town or village to another. To work actively as an underground cadre there now means that you could never disclose your identity to people with whom you do not work closely, even your family. The norm was that no one should know that you are or were in the SCP. The underground was and is highly sensitive to changes in the daily routines and the living conditions of the cadre. The cadres are and were expected to be highly disciplined, working certain hours per day, restricting themselves to limited movement outside the house, reading and writing. The cadres' self-sacrifice manifested itself in their social isolation, leaving their families and friends, and in accepting a scant stipend on which to live. The SCP was forced to opt for this type of underground work due to many factors. These will be discussed in the following section.

4. 3 Internal and External Influences

The SCP underground cadre was and is considered to be a necessity. Various leaders of the party have held and still hold to this notion and they defend it, for example, Nugud, Tigani and Suleiman Hamid.²⁴⁰ It was and is very important for the management of all the activities of the party. Over its lifetime, the SCP has not been able to work openly due to many factors. Initially, the socio-political climate was incapable of accepting Marxist thought or the notion that there was a group of young people who were politically active outside the traditional political parties. This phase soon ended after the early communist members showed that their

²⁴⁰ See the Notes on People appendix for further details of individuals.

party was calling for the independence of the country and was willing to defend the workers and peasants. Secondly, the secret underground cadre was given a central function at the heart of the SCP.²⁴¹ It organized the meetings, ensured the safety of leaders, managed the printing and publishing and executed the political and organisational policies of the party.

During the period 1946 to 1950 the SCP worked totally underground. This might reflect the caution of the early founders of the SCP and their fear that their activities would be hampered. The colonial intelligence reported on the existence of communist activities in 1952.²⁴² At that time, the Sudan intelligence police benefited from the Egyptian intelligence work that resulted in the deportation of many Sudanese communist students from Egypt. The Egyptian intelligence followed left-wing Egyptian and Sudanese students and sometime stormed and searched Sudan students' houses in Egypt. In these raids the Police found communist publications and documents. The students deported from Egypt to Sudan were later involved in politics in the Sudan and supported the Egyptian cause. The Sudan intelligence police began to put communist activism under observation. Many of those students stood trial and either were fined, sentenced to short imprisonment or both. At this time, and specifically in 1949, the first professional underground cadre began his job in Sudan. Before this date all of those in the underground apparatus were volunteer communists. Many interviewees have provided different individual stories, but all agree that underground activities were and are an important element in the survival of the SCP.²⁴³

²⁴¹ This is the general convention within the SCP that Abdullah Obeid, a prominent ex-communist footballer emphasised this in his interview. Obeid left the SCP in the great split of 1970. He was a temporary underground cadre during the first military regime from 1958 to 1964.

²⁴² See the British Intelligence Report No. 171100, dated 2 June 1952. I used the Arabic version translated at this website <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=173&msg=1138912326>, accessed February 2018.

²⁴³ Interview with Muhammad I. Nugud, conducted by Diaá Bilal. Also see the Intelligence Report about the Communists lists.

The underground cadre network was and is important in the sense that it is ‘the central nervous system’ of the SCP, responsible for, and controlling all aspects of party work. Over the entire history of the SCP, it assisted in its long-term preservation and day-to-day existence. In the 1950s, when the colonial administration resorted to arresting communists. Despite this the underground apparatus of the SCP was able to maintain the existence of the party. This was done through ensuring the flow of publications, the safety of leaders, and by selecting new cadres to fill vacant positions when a cadre died or was imprisoned. The SCP was also influenced by lessons learned from the 1924 abortive revolt led by the White Flag Society. This was an early political organisation formed by Sudanese military officers and some educated elites and it called for the liberation of Sudan. It was harshly suppressed by the Colonial Administration.

The SCP’s efforts to establish the underground apparatus was also due to the fact that many of the early cadres, especially the founders of the parties, had been affected by their Egyptian experience. Some of the SCP’s cadres had been members of Egyptian communists cells and factions in the 1940s. At the time, the Egyptian Security Service always hunted down and arrested communists. One famous arrestee was Salah Bushra, a Sudanese communist and medical student in Cairo, who died in prison from tuberculosis after long period of detention. He was arrested with Egyptian and Sudanese student comrades. Another was Abdelkhalig Mahjoub, the Secretary General, who was arrested in Egypt. The SCP was fully aware of these circumstances. The Egyptians also taught the newly recruited Sudanese communists how to protect themselves from attacks, and how to use the offset printing facilities etc. The depth of the Egyptian communists’ influence, solidarity and cooperation was reflected in a famous poem about the death of the Sudanese Communist student called Salah. The poem

was written by an Egyptian, Kamal Abdul-Halim, who was also a leading Egyptian Communist . It reads:

In the midst of rocks, irons, whirlwinds ,tuberculosis ,barriers
And chains ,they killed a hero of us,
Oh, Salah, oh Salah ²⁴⁴

The Egyptian Intelligence Service continued its surveillance in order to monitor, observe and trace both Egyptian and Sudanese communists. These activities continued over many years.

In addition to the Egyptian experience, the need for an underground cadre was clear when the Colonial Administration issued the Subversive Activities Ordinance in 1953, which criminalised any political and communist activities. Any communist would be arrested and brought to trial. This pushed the SCP to choose hiding as part of its central strategy and made the underground apparatus imperative.

4. 4 The Underground Apparatus

The first underground and completely professional cadre began his activity in 1948. This man was Ibrahim Zakariya a prominent Central Committee Member and the Central Organisational Secretary of the party.²⁴⁵ As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, from the SCP's inception in 1946, some of its founding members assumed leading positions within other non-communist political parties. They continued to work from within these parties without disclosing their real affiliation to the SCP. This strategy was occurred after a very heated discussion within the SCP between the cadres who wished to maintain the independence of the party and those who wished to work from within other parties to forward the SCP agenda.

²⁴⁴ This poetry is still sung among Sudanese communists. Kamal. Abdulhalim was an Egyptian poet who worked closely with the first Sudanese cells in Cairo.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Siddig Yousif, Khartoum, Sudan, 2010.

Those members were indispensable to the other parties and the leading organs in these parties did not doubt that some of their cadres were affiliated to the SCP. Some knew this fact, but the activities and contribution of the member could outweigh his affiliation with SCP. In 1952, a split occurred within the SCP. The central issue under debate was whether the SCP would continue working through other political parties or have its own independent identity. The new leadership approved the independence of the SCP, believing that the declaration of independence would preserve the party from bourgeois influences. Despite this, the cadres were left in these other parties as part of its underground apparatus.

The underground apparatus was formed from a group of carefully selected cadres, who were regarded as highly progressive in their thinking and capable of self-denial and dedication. It was and is still unthinkable for someone to become a cadre without great personal and intellectual ability. The unimaginable sacrifices that these cadres were called upon to make are discussed in detail below. These sacrifices also opened the door to the question: why did they do all this? This question is not arbitrary. The reality of life in Sudan and the volume of sacrifices these elites took upon themselves in their jobs as cadres were far from normal. To a great extent they were and are considered to be like Sufis.²⁴⁶ They resemble a Sufi in that both live from a bare minimum of need in food, shelter and clothing. They also do not talk much, live in isolation and are highly respected among the Sudanese people. They have broad knowledge and wisdom.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Sufism offers a peaceful, inner, non-violent, special way of life and interpretation of Islam, according to which a man satisfies himself with the most simple rudimentary things that maintain his existence. Usually he will not mingle with others, nor have aspirations to reach power or the media but will remain in the shadows.

²⁴⁷ This entails a certain irony since the SCP was and is still being attacked by others on the grounds that it will lead to the “decay of the Sudanese society” because it calls for atheism and socialism. The first claim about religion was and is always denied strongly by the SCP, while the SCP continued to explain its views to the Sudanese people on the second point of socialism.

As described in Chapter 3, the underground apparatus was constituted from a group of cadres classified according to their tasks, and mode of 'secrecy'. The apparatus included men and women. Women's roles were not seen as crucial as those of men. This is due to the fact that Sudanese society is a traditional patriarchal one and a woman was and is always expected to live with a family.²⁴⁸ Despite that the SCP has had some women cadres who worked closely with the underground apparatus, but only on certain tasks. This is also due to the fact that underground tasks are physically heavy and require total 'disappearance', which is deemed to be impossible for a woman. Some of the underground cadres were fully professional, which means that a cadre will be an employee in the apparatus, will have no other job and receive a stipend. (This is less than a salary, as will be seen later when I compare a salary of similarly educated employee with a cadre's stipend). Alternatively, the cadre may be an employee in either the government or the private sector or even work independently as an artisan. Within the apparatus, there have been highly educated university graduates, eloquent in different languages, with master's degree or even doctoral degrees. But there have also been elementary school educated workers who were chosen to fulfil certain tasks, and for these tasks they were highly trained and educated in order to perform the task with proficiency. Thus, a group of specialised artisans also formed part of this apparatus, such as those trained in printing and publishing, whereas these were felt to be difficult jobs for the most educated. They had access to offset printing, improvising when using the machine was impossible or too dangerous and this was what usually happened. When I asked some of those who worked in the underground apparatus for 32 years, one said: "There are other cadres who worked more than me [in terms of years]. They are totally unknown to anyone. They do not use their real

²⁴⁸ Women's role in politics has been and is limited due to the facts that most women are illiterate and that traditional customs still dominate in Sudan.

names. They have pseudonyms.”²⁴⁹ No one would use his own name, and would only be known to a few people by his real name. All his identification cards, passports and papers would bear a pseudonym. This raised many questions especially during the recent Fifth Conference, when those cadres were supposed to stand for elections or to run for the Central Committee.²⁵⁰

Aside from what I have cited above as social classifications of the underground cadre, I found that the cadre in this apparatus can be further classified in terms of roles. This brings us to another hidden system of classification, which usually had the following categories:

1. The Normal Underground Cadre (NUC);
2. The Suddenly Disappearing Cadre (SDC);
3. The Leading Underground Cadre in other Parties (LUC-OP);
4. The Underground Cadres in the Armed Forces (UC-AF);
5. The Most Important Cadres in the State (MIC-State).

The ‘Normal’ Underground Cadre is and was a member who lives ‘normally’ and who has certain specific functions. He or she goes to his or her job as an ordinary citizen, whether in government, non-governmental or in private business. S/he remains always known to a limited number of members, with whom s/he works. Examples might include the following:

“S is businessman. He works in an inherited family business and is very rich. His Mercedes, glass shaded is usually used to help transporting leading cadres from one place to another.”²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Interview with Sulieman Hamid, a SCP’s Central Committee member, who worked for about 32 years underground. He writes a column everyday in Almidan Newspaper. He is still active as a SCP Central Committee member and was re-elected recently to same position. He is more than 80 years old.

²⁵⁰ A legal issue arose and they were denied permission to run for the SCP’s Central Committee.

²⁵¹ He was later to become known as a normal member. He remained for the years from 1971 until 1989, known only as a businessman. In 1989, he was arrested and tortured, his arm was broken. He is now active as open public cadre.

“Dr. X is a specialist gynaecologist and also works in a private clinic.”²⁵²

“D is a bus driver in a private company.”²⁵³

“N is a sister in the main hospital and she secures medical help for those who need it.”²⁵⁴

“Brigadier X is responsible for the SCP section in the Armed Forces.”²⁵⁵

“A. Obeid was a famous footballer and had represented Sudan in the first national football team in the fifties.”²⁵⁶

The diversity within these types of cadres is enormous. This is mainly due to the fact that the small organisational unit in the SCP, the branch or cell, must always contain an organisational secretary, who is usually a secret underground cadre. The promotion of one organisational cadre to higher organs depends on many factors, which I shall discuss later under the heading “Qualifications”.

A ‘Sudden Disappearing Cadre’ is a member who moves actively among certain sectors or groups of branches. This cadre, as I have learned from many sources, will be summoned to fill a certain function that requires his disappearance from the surroundings in which he lives. He might be transferred to a town, or abroad where there are communist party branches. Such a SDC can have a real name or a pseudonym. A trade unionist leader was a case in point and he went underground to the Khartoum City Main Office. This cadre was summoned at the end of the 1970s and after the 1985 uprising he returned to conventional life.

²⁵² See above. After torture and release from prison he emigrated and he lives in exile.

²⁵³ Actually, he is a mathematics teacher, a graduate of the university, and after a few years in prison in the seventies, he changed his name and became a bus driver, his real name is unknown. Also his current name cannot be disclosed.

²⁵⁴ She is still working as a sister, is married and has children.

²⁵⁵ Brigadier X lived in exile for some years. The researcher came to know him via a common friend.

²⁵⁶ An Interview with Abdullah Obeid.

The 'Leading Underground Cadre' in other Parties (LUC-OP) is one cadre who is normally a member in another party and recruited to the SCP, or who may be a member of the SCP who enters another party. Usually what helps in this process is the fact that in Sudan tribal and religious affiliations still play a crucial role. Your family's affiliation with a certain sect, such as Ansar or Khatmia, may determine that you enter their party.²⁵⁷

The Underground Cadres in the Armed Forces (UC-AF) were in all branches of the armed forces, whether police, army, security or others. According to state laws and regulations, members of the armed forces must not be affiliated to any political viewpoint, but in Sudan as more generally in Africa, most of the officers, as private individuals, have their private affiliations. In the Sudan, the SCP had in the past had a very strong organisation in the Army, which was called the Free Officers. This organisation was dismantled by the Jaffar Numeiri Regime after the massacre of July 1971.²⁵⁸ This group had worked to recruit others to the SCP's political viewpoint and tried to protect the SCP in times of need. One of the most widely known stories about the strength of this organisation, before it was dismantled, was the story of securing an underground place for the Secretary General, during 1970-1971. This was organised and performed by the Free Officers. I will discuss this later.

The 'Most Important Cadres in the State' (MIC-State) were a very special group of cadres. They reached the top of the political apparatus of the state and they were senior functionaries.

²⁵⁷ There are many cases of this. But the issue is very sensitive and the LUC-OPs usually prefer not to talk about this as this may lead them to cause someone to accuse them of double affiliation.

²⁵⁸ As outlined in Chapter 2, the Free Officers was an organization established by communists and democratic officer/soldiers in the army to fight for independence and continued in the army and other forces until 1971. All its activities were underground. After the 1969 Coup by Jaffar Numeiri, in cooperation with Free Officers, this organisation was uncovered. Differences between Numeiri and the Free Officers led to the famous coup of 19 July 1971, which was led by Communists Officers and their allies. The men behind the Coup held power for only three days. When Numeiri returned to power by means of a counter coup, he executed all the leaders of the coup and also executed the Central Committee Members, an action which was described by many as a massacre. After that, any political activity especially by left affiliated officers, became very dangerous and now there is no such organisation in the Armed Forces.

They had extensive relationships within the government, security apparatus and other branches, such as the legislation, the judiciary. Some of them were only disclosed as party members after their death. In their obituaries some of their functions might have been mentioned, but not in any detail. The most notorious examples within this group were Imams or other high religious authorities in the country, or even the undersecretary of the party.

What all underground cadres share is a life of secrecy. As Sulieman Hamid put it in his interview:

Any comrade who 'goes underground' totally lives in total secrecy. Others have a relative degree of secrecy, because they are not known to the security apparatus of the State. Most of their life is underground, and usually they do not have contacts with their families.... Some of the underground comrades have a pseudonym. We have a comrade who works with us in the centre of the Party; no one knows his name.²⁵⁹

But what sort of work did these cadres carry out? This is a primary question, as someone might spend his whole life underground. Interview material suggests that 'disappearing' was a job that allowed a cadre to commit his/her whole life to being confined voluntarily in a certain place and doing specific jobs. It was quite usual for one of them to suddenly leave his domicile and travel to another place.²⁶⁰

Another classification of underground cadres based upon function can be given. This is an internal one and is characterised by professionalism and role. What type of function the cadre performs in the underground apparatus will specify his place, and position. In each sector, a division within the SCP, as well as within each town (as another type of division) has its own

²⁵⁹ Interview with Sulieman Hamid.

²⁶⁰ It depends upon the residential area where the cadre lives. We shall see this later in this study.

underground cadres. However, there are central cadres that can be called the ‘central nervous system’ of the party because they are responsible for the functioning of all the various ‘limbs’ of the party. The central underground cadres can be classified as follows:

1. ***Security Cadres***. These are professionals responsible for ensuring the security of the party. Like any intelligence agency, cadres are required in different areas and sectors to gather information, analyse it and recommend or even order some type of intervention. This wing of the underground is called the Security Apparatus. Those who work in it are not known even to many Central Committee members. Three or four members have access to this Apparatus and only one member of the Central Committee has direct contact with those cadres and knows them, but he himself is highly protected and kept in absolute secrecy.

2. ***Central Printing & Publishing Cadres***. This is another crucial unit of cadres. They are highly specialised in printing, publishing, offset, typewriting and maintenance of their machinery and equipment. Where they print and publish is not where the material is typewritten, corrected and edited before final dispatch to the printing house. There is another unit closely connected to this unit. This is the Transport and Transfer Unit, which specialises in taking the printed material from the printing house to what is called the ‘station’, a place, mostly a house or office, where the printed material is brought and delivered for dispatch to the branches. Sometimes, there may be more than one ‘station’, depending upon the security situation in the country or place. For example, in case of emergencies, the transport and transfer unit might use the help of cadres who can move from one place to another without raising the suspicions of an average security agent. Here the women cadres play a pivotal role. A woman may take the printed material in a basket, made out of date straws, as if she is taking shopping from one place to another. Also the Transport and Transfer Unit’s cadres may use the help of people in the security process itself, if they were sympathetic with the Party.

An important factor in securing this cadre is the selection of the houses where the printing machinery is placed and functions. According to some interviewees, non-popular residential areas were preferred. This is mainly due to the fact that popular residential areas are crowded, have small areas, small rooms. People in popular residential areas were and are curious and have close relationship with each other, and could visit one at any time without notice. According to Obeid they prefer other areas with spacious rooms and where the nature and customs of people living there are different.²⁶¹

3. ***The Organizational Cadres.*** This cadre specialised in communication between the Central Committee and the Central Organisation Office, which is responsible for all organisational matters including the division of labour. This unit is also responsible for one of the most important tasks, which was called “connecting the members”. If you were a member and you were transferred from your current residence to another within the town, or from one town to another, or from one sector of economic activity to another, this unit would arrange your transfer. If they did not send your ticket to where you were currently resident or working, the branch or unit there would not admit you to the meeting, even if they knew you and some of them may have worked with you in other units of the party.

These cadres are very important and very specialised. The channels which they use to communicate, i.e. to contact other units, and branches are divided among them; each of them has a specific number of connections. However things could go badly wrong. For example, AA was responsible for connecting the newly trained members to their respective sectors or place of work. He took the coded names and brief comments from the Central Organisational Office and would deliver them to a particular underground cadre, whom he would meet at a specific agreed place. On one occasion when he arrived at where he was supposed to meet the

²⁶¹ Op. cit. Interview with A. Obeid.

other cadre, the latter was not at the agreed place. Immediately he was arrested by the security agents and searched, but they found nothing, only a small paper on which town names were written. As he was a musician he held his violin with his left hand while the agents searched him. He had been released for five minutes, when an officer summoned him to deliver his violin for a search. There the security found the 141 names of graduates from different disciplines who should be connected to their respective branches. Many of them were arrested.²⁶² However, it was later disclosed that the security agents had followed a student who arrived to deliver messages from the branch to the cadre and both were arrested before AA's arrival. This led to a massive reorganisation.

4. *Transportation & Security.* This unit is specialized in the transportation of underground and leading cadres. They are mostly unknown to the Security Branch and live in absolute secrecy. Here is an example provided by an anonymous informant: "When the SCP's Central Committee decided, after the coup of June 1989, that some of its central cadre group should travel to England and Egypt, the Transportation and Security Unit was commissioned to carry this message."²⁶³ First, they secured the travel of Dr Izzeldin Ali Amer, who travelled via Khartoum Airport and reached Cairo. They also arranged for him to meet with the authorities in Cairo. His statements disclosed what was happening in the Sudan, which, until that time, had been unknown in the outside world.²⁶⁴ He described the use of torture by the regime and the notorious "Ghost Houses practices"²⁶⁵, which was new to Sudanese political, culture and society. Before then, Sudanese political struggle had been peaceful and the use of

²⁶² This was a very famous case in the 1980s, AA was imprisoned for a long time. In the 1990s he lived in exile in Egypt. He died in 2005.

²⁶³ The informant 1 told us that the people who carried out these tasks were totally unknown to anyone.

²⁶⁴ The use of torture and the systematic abuses of human rights were documented in the publications of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch etc. Dr Amer then left for England where he lived and practiced medicine until his death.

²⁶⁵ Ghost houses were detention centres established by the regime that came to power in the military coup of 1989. These detention houses were used to detain political, trade unionist and activist opponents. They were infamous for the unprecedented practices of torture. They were named ghost houses because the perpetrators of torture wore masks, the rooms were small for the number of detainees, dark and detainees were tortured in multiple ways and deprived of all kind of rights and freedoms.

arms and torture was still unacceptable. Later that same year, Tigani Eltayeb, who was under house arrest in Omdurman, was smuggled to Cairo via the Egyptian borders. He travelled more than two thousands kilometres from Khartoum to Port Sudan, then to Haleib and from there to Cairo. All such endeavours were organised and implemented by the Transport & Transfer Unit.

5. *Specialised Units.* As mentioned previously there are also specialised units for youth, students, women, trade unions, minority groups and the like. These units confine themselves to certain functions in the areas where those target groups operate. A word here must be said about the role of women in the underground apparatus. In the most dangerous and perilous conditions, women cadres played a pivotal role in fulfilling certain tasks that were impossible for men. Taking a message to a prisoner in the state Security Headquarters is just one example.²⁶⁶ Another example, taken from my interview material, shows how the woman were able to contribute to these activities. When the state of emergency was declared, one of the organisational cadres was supposed to deliver a message to Central Committee member YY, who was under observation and had an arrest order ready for him. He was to leave the house where he lived. At 8.00 p.m. the state of emergency would come into force and YY was to be arrested after midnight by two teams. It was 7. 00 p.m. and the car would take a half hour to reach him. The surveillance team car would leave its spot between 7.00 and 8.00 p.m. to buy dinner from the nearest shopping centre. If YY moved from his house, he had to take a bus, which was dangerous; also he had to take his bag full of papers. He needed help. Since the matter was urgent a woman cadre ZZ was commissioned to buy him food. She was a medical doctor and had permission to move from one place to another. She took her car, drove to the place where YY where was stationed. She met the first organisational cadre who gave her the correct code so that YY would trust her. She reached him, YY drove back to her hospital

²⁶⁶ This is usually a common practice, when a woman carries messages and printed material to the prisoners.

wearing a medical officer overall and ZZ sat beside him as if they were colleagues going on to the night shift.²⁶⁷

4. 5 Qualifications

If the underground apparatus is the ‘central nervous system’ of the SCP and also its ‘heart’, who is then qualified to be included in this sensitive and important unit? The SCP imposes high standards for its membership including morality, honesty, courage, patience, strength, total conviction and many other qualities. These categories point to the abilities that each of these cadres might be expected to possess. No one that I interviewed said exactly what qualities a cadre ought to have, but there was a general agreement among the SCP membership, as reflected in their organisational literature, that an underground cadre should possess crucial characteristics, qualifications and some of these had to be acquired through training, and experience. Of all these characteristics the most important was that an underground cadre be convinced of what she or he is doing and devotes her or himself to the cause of the party. Some of the people that I interviewed had been variously trained in Marxism, driving cars, car maintenance, rhetoric, political tactics, leading demonstration, and had attended trade union courses.²⁶⁸ My research suggests that even those who deserted the SCP did not disclose any potentially harmful information about their work or its secrets and never worked against the party to bring danger to the rest of their fellow members. Despite that, the SCP had always taken precautionary measures to avoid any leak of information. When a cadre leaves his or her position and deserts the party, a re-organisational change had to occur.

²⁶⁷ ZZ is still a medical officer. This happened during the current regime. Our Informant 2 kept the names and gave only coded names. This story was verified against what others said in the interviews.

²⁶⁸ Interview with A. Obeid.

The second most important characteristics were patience and stamina. Cadres had to be patient, have the ability to remain calm in time of crisis and the ability to endure all kinds of hazards and odds. This is because a cadre may be required to sit in a remote area alone for days on end, waiting for someone to pick him up. Furthermore, he may not speak with a human being for weeks. Moreover, he may have to do a monotonous task for days or months. The third characteristic is an aspiration to promote the cause of the party and not his or her own personal cause. Thus some of the cadres abandoned their careers as university lecturers, or medical officers, and one left his father's business altogether to receive a stipend that was scarcely enough for his survival.²⁶⁹

The underground cadre must also have the ability and strength to conduct observation and follow-up. He had to observe any tiny changes and record strange movements of other subjects. This would help him prevent any counter attacks on him or other cadres. For this, they were trained either inside or outside Sudan. The course always consisted of observation, intelligence information gathering and surveillance. Good power of observation includes the ability to dissolve any meeting, immediately, if he felt a risk was involved. In addition to all the above, he had to have the ability to act promptly, to take a decision and turn a particular situation to his advantage, especially if confronted with an enemy. An example of this is Tigani when he was arrested in a house where he claimed to be another person. He was released when he reached the Security Complex Headquarters, but there he met an old

²⁶⁹ Three very prominent examples are as follows: al-Khatim Adlan was an important member of the Political Bureau of the SCP, who graduated from the University of Khartoum. He left his university career to work underground for SCP. Later he left the party due to a conflict of views with some other members. Another example is Yousif Hussein, a Central Committee member and geologist and also destined to be a University teacher. A third example is Shafie Khider, a medical doctor. He is now a Central Committee member. Before the current regime, he worked for many years underground. Due to heart disease, he was transferred to become an open cadre.

security agent who knew him personally. He was re-arrested and imprisoned for the period 1980-1985.²⁷⁰

My interview data suggests that to qualify for employment as an underground cadre, an individual must have a very high level of physical fitness and health. A general test would be carried out to ensure that he did not have serious diseases that may hamper performance or lead to unexpected deterioration of health. Fitness had to be combined with patience and a high level of endurance, as a cadre might live for days on water and small amounts of bread or even fast. Ability to solve problems when confronted with certain odd things was also needed. The underground cadre was usually supposed to be trained extensively about the structure and function of the party. However, interviewees suggest that this was not in fact the case. The cadres depended upon their own instinct and what they learned through experience, trial and error, although some of them had followed external training in an Eastern Bloc country. This sort of training was specialised but never disclosed to non-members.

China in the 1950s also provided training to SCP underground cadres. Obeid, a prominent SCP and Central Committee member and underground cadre for short periods, was trained with others in China. "I admired the Chinese experience. There I had different types of training to qualify me to be an underground cadre."²⁷¹ Alsir Najib had a different experience. "We were sent to the Soviet Union and we got methodological training in surveillance, intelligence information gathering and analysis, use of small arms for protection and how to

²⁷⁰ In this case, Tigani Eltayeb was arrested in a house where he usually came for meetings. He claimed he was Taha Abu Zaid and his personal identification card showed that. The team took him to the Headquarters, where no one knew him. After a preliminary investigation he was released. Before he reached the gate, Kamal Hassan Ahmed a prominent, specialized communist chaser immediately recognised him. Ironically Kamal Hassan Ahmed is a relative of Abdel Khalig Mahjoub, the executed Secretary General, and nephew of many prominent communist members.

²⁷¹ Interview with Obeid.

manage a small intelligence network. When I returned to Sudan we were attached to a unit responsible for the security of the SCP.”²⁷² Najib was also trained in East Germany, Cuba, Hungary and Bulgaria, which ran short training courses to enhance the cadre’s capacities and keep his information in areas of training up to date.²⁷³

The SCP’s own training programme consists of on-the-job training for professional and vocational cadres. Also it covers training to carry out surveillance, how to make decisions, observe and analyse. In part these skills were based upon the personal endeavours of the cadres and were endorsed by the higher organs of the party. Lectures on how to ensure the security of a place and cadres were a standard part of a course given to all members, but more extensively and intensively to the underground cadres. Moreover, they were encouraged to take minutes, write on small pieces of paper and code their writings so that, if a document were to come into the wrong hands, it could not be read or decoded. They were also encouraged to train themselves in wider-ranging office skills such as filing, archiving, time management and typing. This training was developed over time. Until recently the SCP worked with traditional methods and depended upon the personal skills of the individual cadres, which provoked much criticism. Modernisation was requested, but was implemented slowly.

Some interviewees stressed the fact that internal conviction is very important. As Nugud said, “Look, to choose to be an underground cadre is an act, and an act needs conviction, the conviction and the act must have a goal. The moment of choice need courage, there are a very large numbers of our generation who belonged to the Sudan national, student or association

²⁷² Interview with al-Sir Najib, a SCP leading member.

²⁷³ *ibid.*

movement, but they were not interested in full-time politics.”²⁷⁴ Nugud also stressed the importance of having members with full-time political careers: “Without full-time employed cadres, the Sudanese C.P cannot manage its day-to-day work. The cadres are very important for this party.”²⁷⁵ A. Ibrahim referred to the difference between the SCP cadre who are required to make and do other political work. He said, “People who sacrifice and take up a professional career in politics show different degrees of awareness. A full-time cadre in the SCP comes to this job after deciding to give all his life for a cause which might lead to death.”²⁷⁶ He continued, “Sacrifice is connected to your consciousness and to the fact that you have resourcefulness, patience and time to devote to the cause you belief in.”²⁷⁷

4. 6 Daily Life as an Underground Cadre

The interviews show that the daily life of an underground cadre differs according to whether he lives in a town or a village. If in a town, it varies according to whether he lives in a traditional residential area or in a modern residential area. These places determine the path taken, the approach, attitude and even the social behaviour of the underground cadre. In this respect it must be remembered that social customs and traditions in the Sudan are very crucial and play a central role in the protection of many underground cadres. Many stories reflect this fact. Each cadre would have a different daily routine. Three different cadres I interviewed agreed on one thing: all of them woke up very early in the morning to begin their work. They were self-disciplined and dedicated to their jobs. Khatim said:

I wake up at 4.00am and sit and read specific material until 6.00 in the morning. From 6.00 to 9.00 am, I write and review written material. Then I prepare my breakfast. From 9.00 am to 2.00 in the afternoon I carry out different jobs related to the activities of the

²⁷⁴ Interview with Nugud, interview conduct by Diaá, see footnote no. 8.

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Interview with A. Ibrahim.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*

party. Between 2.00 and 3.00 pm, I receive the newspapers to read and make any comments on a separate paper with the relevant article attached. I begin my movement outside the house after 6.00 pm [darkness in Sudan].”²⁷⁸

Khatim continues: “I do not drink and usually if I come across someone who drinks I will just spend a short time with him and leave. I also do not live with people who drink inside the house where I live. We usually agree to drink outside our residential house.”²⁷⁹

Sulieman has a different story:

I begin my day at 6.00 am. I drink a cup of tea and begin writing and reviewing until 10.00 am. I prepare my breakfast and then continue my work till 2.00 in the afternoon. I never take a nap in the middle of the day. I will usually move, if I have an appointment outside, after 6.00 in the evening. But when I was living in my last hiding place, as a university lecturer I moved normally at any time I wished without raising any suspicions.”²⁸⁰

Abdullahi tells how he has a different daily routine:

I wake up early at about 6.00 am and I sit at the table and begin my work until 10.00 am. I prepare my breakfast and after that I walk inside the house for a short time. I return to work until one o’clock and then I take a short nap. In the evening I begin walking outside the house. On Thursdays, I either visit some comrades where I remain the whole night and all day Friday. We then have some drinks, chat and wind down. Sometimes friends come and take me to have fun with them. If you know what you do and have control, then it is easy to arrange things and enjoy different activities.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Interview with al-Khatim Adlan. Khatim was member of the Political Bureau of the SCP, the organ that leads the daily activities of the SCP.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Interview with Sulieman Hamid.

²⁸¹ Interview with Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim.

But not every member has the same activities as these three. Other cadres in the rural areas have told different stories.

I wake up with the Athan.²⁸² I go to the mosque and say the prayers with others and return home to change into my work overalls as I have told the people that I work as labourer in Sudan Railways. I usually go to the train station where other comrades are waiting for me. We take the train together to where we already have a small offset and printing machine. During the journey from one town to another, we print a certain amount of releases or internal communiqués. When we arrive at the station we deliver our printed material to a certain person according to the time schedule.²⁸³

He continues: “Drinking in the village is for us impossible. If one of us wants to drink, he has to travel to the nearby town. But actually I myself never have a drink.”²⁸⁴ This activity was situational, related to the period after the massacre of 1971. Such situational activities can be repeated in different forms and situations with different cadres.

We are a group of underground cadres in the same house. One of us has a job and so he leaves early in the morning. Others may prepare the meals and go to buy the daily groceries.²⁸⁵ We modified the room where we printed the party publications. The windows and the wall next to the street were covered with cotton mattresses so they can absorb any sound made by the printing machine. The house next to us is also occupied by a communist’s family but they never visit us at home. Anyone who walks near our house can’t observe anything extraordinary, nor can he or she hear the sound of the printing machine.

²⁸² ‘Athan’ is the call for prayers. It is repeated five times a day. A. Kamarat is talking here about morning prayers ‘Alsubuh’ or ‘Fajr’ from about four to five in the morning.

²⁸³ Interview with A. Kamarat.

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Usually the houses had no refrigerators at the time. Even now in most traditional residential areas houses for rent have no furniture or equipment. You have to buy it yourself. In this case, it is understandable that the cadre who goes to do the shopping will be specialised in this and must be totally underground.

We spend the whole day printing. In the evening some of us will move to deliver the printed material and have a change of air. One of us has to deliver the material to the station and return. We do not have contact with the other people in the area as they think we are traders who come and go. If some of us wish to have a drink, the others will remain alert. We do not allow the whole group to get drunk. Sometimes, we request the one who wants to have some change of scene to go with certain comrades specifically for this purpose. But this is not a common practice.²⁸⁶

But if one lives in a traditional residential area, where the social and neighbourhood ties cannot be ignored, one has to feign stories to escape the odd looks and questions of the neighbours. In such cases, the cadre is not alone. This means that he must have company and contacts with his neighbourhood. In such a situation, as narrated by Sulieman Hamid, he lived in a house divided between him and another family, who was also an underground member. They had a door between the two divisions. They also had two telephone lines. If the red telephone rang, he would never pick up the receiver, a certain person would reply and answer the call. If the other side said the code word, Sulieman would be called to answer. If the black phone rang any one in the house could reply except Sulieman. Also, if someone knocked on the door, a certain person would open it. If someone from the residential area needed something or wanted to talk with Sulieman, he might allow him in (if Sulieman wished that) or he might apologize for him. In this residential area, Mr Sulieman lived for more than ten years with the identity of a university professor. He usually moved from home taking with him files and documents. The people knew that he was going to lecture and greeted him as usual. His name at the time was Dr Abdul Rahaman. His relationship with people was even

²⁸⁶ Interview with FF, an active underground cadre. Their case came to light in the 1980s when the regime invaded their house and arrested and confiscated the machines. The capture of this group was said to be one of most successful security operations. The house and group arrest was due to a penetration realised when a SCP member who had once visited the house before, was threatened and he disclosed the information.

stronger at this time than when he was totally underground. Recalling his underground activity, in this residential area, he said:

Most of time I wear a full suit and take some files and books with me. When I see some people sitting, I stop to say hello to them.²⁸⁷ If someone is sick I will visit him and if someone has died, I will go with the people to cemetery to bury the dead.²⁸⁸ If a woman gives birth,²⁸⁹ I usually visit the family to say congratulation and give some support.²⁹⁰

These social contacts and customs were and are very important and can be very beneficial to the underground cadre, as long as he knows when to stop an unwanted contact or approach.

Another story comes from Mr Tigani, who lived as underground cadre and was well known as “Mr Taha Abu Zaid,” a high school teacher. Alsahafa is a well-known traditional residential area in Khartoum, where many middle and working class families live.

Tigani/Taha lived there and usually had ‘ordinary’ contacts with the people: “If there was a calamity, such as in the autumn, when the water and rain flooded the residential area, I went with other people to open the sewers and help the most vulnerable people to protect themselves from water with sandbags.”²⁹¹ This is only one example of such behaviour.

Sometimes, if there would be a bigger problem and the cadre would be the only one able to solve it. This happened, when a drunkard began to quarrel with his mother and to destroy

²⁸⁷ In the Sudan until recently, men would gather together on chairs to converse outside their houses. They would usually choose one house where there was sufficient space to put out their chairs and sit, sometimes to play dominos or cards. If you pass them, the normal and highly appreciated behaviour is to greet them and exchange some words. If you ignore them you may raise suspicions.

²⁸⁸ In the Sudan, if you live in a residential area, or in a rural area in a village or a small town, when you hear that someone has died, you are expected to participate with other people in burying the dead and consoling the family. After the burial the mourners return home and make a tent for condolences. In this tent most of the people of the residential area will come together, the women with women and men with men. It is one of the most important social customs.

²⁸⁹ If a woman gives birth or someone marries, the neighbourhood will contribute a small amount of money to help the family. It is called “Mugamalah” or “Milk price” in the case of a birth and “Kashif” for marriage support. Also, in a case of death, people pay a small amount according to their ability to support the family, in addition, to bringing food and drinks during the days of mourning.

²⁹⁰ An interview with Sulieman Hamid.

²⁹¹ An Interview with Tigani Eltayeb.

possessions in their house. No one dared to face him. According to witnesses, Tigani went to the house, knocked on the door and went in. After a while the man calmed down. Tigani spent an hour with him and then he left the house. After that hour's talk and discussion with Tigani, the man, who was said to be an addict, never had a drink again. Tigani himself never repeated this story.²⁹²

The late Mr Elfatih al-Rashied was an underground cadre who worked in the apparatus that ensured the security of the printing unit of the party. He said: "I worked as a bar-keeper in Kosti Cinema.²⁹³ In the cinema I arranged the meetings of the underground cadres during the period 1958 – 64 during the Aboud Military Regime.²⁹⁴ The meetings were always held in the cinema during the screening of the film. My work as barkeeper was to disguise the Party's work."²⁹⁵ Thus, the daytime activities of this cadre were totally different from the others. He normally went to the market and met others in their work place, if their situation permitted this.

Mohamed Ahmed Sulieman narrated another unusual example:

The group that I led were all underground cadres. They worked as employees in ordinary business companies and they had to come at seven o'clock in the morning and leave with other public employees. They never knew that the owner of this business was in the party himself. Sometimes other cadres came and alleged that they were the

²⁹² In an article in memory of Tigani, by Dr. Shafie Khider published in Almidan newspaper. N.D.

²⁹³ Kosti is a large town in central Sudan on the White Nile and it is the port for ships sailing to the South of Sudan. It has a big railway station and connects West Sudan with the rest of the country. It is also an industrial city.

²⁹⁴ The Aboud Military Regime was a regime that came to power after the coup of 1958, two years after Independence. It continued in power until October 1964, when it was overthrown by a popular uprising using the weapons of the general public strike and civil disobedience.

²⁹⁵ An Interview with the late Mr. Alfatih Alrashied.

owners of the business but I know they were ordered to do so. Actually I myself worked with others on this.²⁹⁶

This diversity of occupation was also imposed by the circumstances in which the cadres found themselves. Another cadre told a different story. This was actually not about what he did every day, but about how sometimes, one might be forced to carry out certain jobs to avoid any danger. One of the cadres who were responsible for ensuring the security of *Al-Midan*, the newspaper of the SCP, was forced to act as a peddler selling kerosene with a cart drawn by a donkey.

One day our printing machine stopped working and I had to take it to someone for repair. When I was outside the house I found two secret agents watching the house and they followed me. I tried my best to escape, but in the end I went to the station and bought extra kerosene, which was poured over the machine. After this the agents disappeared thinking that I was a real peddler, I returned home and the machine worked normally because the kerosene had washed the dust and rust off it. I repeated this practice for some time until no one came to watch our house again.”²⁹⁷

The publicly known cadre, whose life is threatened, may also go underground. These cadres had another set of rules. Because they are well known to the public, they have to take precautionary measures. The underground apparatus will work to protect them. Most of them lived in areas where social contacts and relations with the neighbourhood are very weak. This is the case in modern residential areas in cities and towns. In such places the neighbours are urbanised and only focus on their personal matters. They scarcely know their neighbours and

²⁹⁶ An Interview with Mohamed Ahmed Sulieman. Sulieman was old underground cadre, he joined the party when he was 16 and worked underground from 1950 – 1970, when he deserted the party after the great split in 1970. Sulieman had managed many businesses, such as pharmacies, cooperatives etc. in Greater Khartoum, all were then owned by the SCP. *SCP invested money contributed by members, sympathisers and supporters.*

²⁹⁷ An Interview with Al-Sir Al-Natiq, one of the Al-Midan cadre.

if they see them, they only exchange greetings from car windows. The late Secretary General Muhammad Ibrahim Nugud lived among other places, in *Al-Fardous*, a luxurious, residential area in Khartoum. He lived underground for eleven years, from 1994, in this area before he was picked up by the Security Police.²⁹⁸ It was commonly known as the residential area of the very rich people. The possibility that a communist political leader might live there was unimaginable. He had also lived underground from 1970 to 1985. After the conflict between the party and the *Numeiri* regime, Nugud ‘disappeared’ in 1971 and only appeared again after the 1985 uprising.

Most of the underground cadres do not meet in the place, house or apartment where they live. They must move to another place to meet with others. This movement is precarious and risky and may endanger the life of the cadre. The house where each cadre lived had to remain highly secure. The security measures in operation are clear from the following quote: “I was requested by XX to take him to a meeting near a mosque. I dropped him somewhere in a lonely place. Another car came and took him, to some unknown place.”²⁹⁹ Sometimes conditions might force a cadre to seek help even if this might bring risks to others:

After the coup in 1989, I had a meeting with some group in *Burri*,³⁰⁰ when I reached the house I found no one there. I immediately moved to avoid ambush. After a while I came to the house of a Central Committee member. I knocked. He had visitors who were considered enemies. However I made some quick changes to my appearance and put on a badge and they drove me to near my home.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ Nugud was arrested in 7 April 2005 by three teams led by the Head of the Security Apparatus General Salah Goosh, and his deputy. The Security said they were visiting Nugud to reassure themselves about his health and to seek his opinion of SCP about the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1593 related to the War Crimes in Darfur.

²⁹⁹ An Interview with a Transport Cadre.

³⁰⁰ *Burri* is a residential area in Khartoum near the Blue Nile and behind the Airport.

³⁰¹ Interview with Khatim.

Stories about underground cadres are often intriguing. For example, M.A. tells how a simple man, Mustafa, was arrested and accused. The Security Forces found nothing in the house where he was arrested and found him playing cards with himself:

This happened when we were arrested. We found an old man sitting under the shadow of the four meters tall wall of the Kober Central Prison. He was playing cards. We learnt his name was Mustafa. His story was very simple, he was arrested because the Security thought that he was a leading figure in the SCP. He claimed to be innocent and that he was an ordinary plumber.³⁰²

To prove his case to us, he said he had a family. Many people did not understand his argument. But later on someone explained: “Some of the underground cadre refused to marry, because they think marriage will make you anxious, as you will think about your family and children which diverts your attention from the party and its defence.”³⁰³

The diversity of the daily life of the cadres depended on many factors. However, their family and emotional life would also have a strong bearing upon them and their way of organising their underground existence. Most of them would make a deal with their families about their underground life. The family’s acceptance of such a life, in which the spouses may be separated, would encourage them to continue as a married couple with children. But not all of them were separated from their families. Some of them lived with their family and had fake jobs outside the house where they conducted their party functions in an anonymous place. It might not always go smoothly; there could be complaints, problems and dangers. Those who were not married were likely to suffer more than those who had a partner. For married

³⁰² An Interview with M. A.. Later the interviewee heard that Mustafa died after the Popular Uprising in 1985. His name was also not Mustafa and he was not a plumber.

³⁰³ Interview with M. A..

couples, where the man was an underground cadre, the woman played a pivotal role in securing the safety of documents.

In another case:

My father was an underground cadre when our house was stormed by the Security Arrest Team. The team leader told us that our father is responsible for printing material against the government. They began to search the house. My mother at the time was on the delivery bed and our new born brother S. was breastfeeding. My father asked my mother how to hide things. She took the documents and put them under her pillow. When the search was over, the team leader apologised to my parents and never came again. My father was never arrested.³⁰⁴

In another example an interviewee says:

In Khartoum, an underground cadre lived normally with his family. He had a big beard and usually early in the morning went to the mosque to say his prayers. In the evening when he had nothing to do he went to the mosque to attend Holy Koran lessons. He remained underground until 1985 when he made a mistake that led the underground apparatus to transfer him to another town.³⁰⁵

Some married underground cadres met their wives once each month if the conditions permitted. Others met every two weeks and some after some months. Each meeting between the two had to be carefully arranged. For example, a wife might come on Thursday at night and remain the whole of Friday. When she came, she would enter by another door, not the one used usually by the underground cadre. For example Suleiman Hamid related: “My wife

³⁰⁴ Story told to the researcher by an informant who sympathises with the SCP. His father’s affiliation with the SCP became known in the Third Democratic Era, 1985-1989. At that time the man was over 78 years old.

³⁰⁵ Actually the SCP Underground Apparatus requested the family to move to another town. As the risks were big the wife opted to move to the town of her family, which was also a good solution for the cadre who once again returned to his underground activities in the new town. He began to speak openly to support SCP in the trade union elections.

comes once a month to me. This day has to be a Thursday and she remains until Saturday morning.”³⁰⁶ Others might not have the same arrangement as that of Mr Sulieman. For example, Khatim said: “Usually I meet my wife in a house of a friend or another family. We spend the whole day together and then she returns home and I return to my underground house.”³⁰⁷ There many other stories about the family life of the underground cadres. Some engaged couples tried to resolve it another way, usually in urban areas. A well-off member, usually a lawyer or doctor would hire a flat in a modern residential area. The engaged couples could meet there and spend sometime together. When they married, they would have other arrangements.

Although, many cadres lived in harmony despite these difficult arrangements, others did not. For this reason many of the underground apparatus left the party in the great split in 1970. The central issue between the different party units was over the nature of the new regime that came to power with a coup using socialist slogans and benefiting from the Nasser regime in Egypt that exercised considerable influence in the Arab world and especially Sudan at the time. Also the split was fuelled by the analysis of the new regime as some leaders said it was a coup, others argued for considering it as a revolution and they wanted to participate in it. The SCP refused and asked its cadres not to participate but some cadres saw the regime as their salvation from the harsh life they were leading.³⁰⁸ Many secret cadres left the party in 1970. This, as some interviewees emphasised, created chaos within SCP. It has also been documented in party documents that many of those who left the party became, in a very short time, very rich and assumed public office or set up businesses or collaborated with the government or its secret intelligence agencies.

³⁰⁶ An Interview with Sulieman Hamid.

³⁰⁷ An Interview with Al-Khatim Adlan.

³⁰⁸ An interview with Alsir Najib.

To be abreast of up-to-date information and connected, a cadre had to build some kind of network that supplied him with information in addition to that supplied by the SCP. In this respect, most of the cadres depended upon their social networks which might include relationships with family members, friends, student and school colleagues, neighbours, and tribal and political allies. Many interviewees disclosed that they obtained information about events before they happened, such as arrests in certain residential areas. The best known examples were coups and military interventions. After assessing a piece of information, the cadre would alert the party and take their own precautionary measures. Further, through cadre networks the SCP in many instances avoided catastrophic searches of its secret apparatus and houses. The SCP was able to stop infiltrations and that was due to information provided by high-ranking police functionaries. In a very famous infiltration attempt, the Sudanese intelligence had implanted an infiltrator with the mission to monitor all the secret hiding places of prominent SCP underground leaders. The infiltrator succeeded to some extent, but he was discovered and expelled from the SCP.

The information that came to the cadres through these channels was not confined to intelligence information, but also included social, cultural and educational information. Through various channels, some of the cadres received the most up-to-date books published worldwide. The network actively sought to satisfy the needs of the cadres by bringing books, newspapers, educational materials and even letters from abroad. In addition to these networks, some cadres were connected with the outside world by following up the news on small radios. As one cadre put it: "It is important to have a radio with you if you go underground. Because with the radio you can follow up both the news of your country and the outside world."³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ A source who wishes to remain anonymous.

Both those who were totally underground and those who could move during the day, usually had a radio. According to some interviewees, they listened to certain news broadcasts such as the “BBC”, “Monte Carlo”, “Voice of America” and “Omdurman Radio”. The radio as a channel of information helped many of those cadres to move from one place to another during political unrest. As said by some cadres, the analysis given in these broadcasts and the news released would give a guide to how events might develop and was complementary to the information that they already had through SCP channels.

Colleagues could play a pivotal role in supplying crucial information to the SCP leading underground cadres. A story related to two prominent cadres indicates the importance and danger of such channels. The two underground cadres, one was a former military officer and the other was a university lecturer, were leading the Khartoum town committee which was responsible for the whole Khartoum province. Khartoum was well known as a major centre for the SCP. To secure information without the knowledge of the SCP’s higher organs, the two had rented a flat in a very modern residential area, and began to organise ‘get together’ meetings and [drinking alcohol](#) sessions for colleagues working in the security, military and as higher functionaries. On these occasions, the two were able to get up-to-date information about the security situation, possible raids and search campaigns. The information was used to secure the cadres and to avoid possible raids by the Security Police in the 1970s and 80s. While this was crucial to the security of the SCP, the two also used the information to suppress oppositional comrades in the party. As a result of this practice and as leaders, the two had doubts about the movement of a member inside the party. They began to classify members according to a security mentality. This in the end led to the isolation of the SCP from the popular opinion. However, this sort of stereotyping was not endorsed by the SCP and the two were expelled after their practices were denounced.

4. 7 Recognising Cadres

A SCP member can defend the policies of the party and can fight directly, but an underground cadre cannot. If a cadre is a member of the judiciary or the armed forces what does he do?

Also if a cadre was commissioned and trained to live and communicate with a name that he or she has just been given, such a cadre might struggle to become accustomed to replying to someone who calls her or him by their real name. Interviewees tell me that this happened, but fortunately the cadres have the intelligence to find excuses for it. Again, if a cadre meets a friend, does not recognize him or her and is called by him or her by an intimate real name what does he or she do? The responses here are varied and interesting. One cadre changed his way of walking, while another asked an artist to make some changes to his face and hair:

“With a wig, glasses and a change in my way of walking, I spent sometime moving from one place to another when most of the houses were stormed by the Security Police of the State.”³¹⁰

This happened in the early 1970s when the art of disguise and make up was not very developed and in Sudan virtually unknown.

Another interviewee told us about disguising himself as a beggar,³¹¹ wearing a Dervish garment, with a large, long rosary on his chest, carrying a jug and begging.³¹² This same Dervish might be a comrade who came to deliver a message to you in a very crisis situation

³¹⁰ Interview with Khatim.

³¹¹ In the Sudan a beggar may knock your door and ask for help. Usually people give them food, water, clothes and money. They accept anything you offer. Beggars also may be stationed in certain streets, bus and train stations, and hospitals and in the market. This due mainly to the fact that there no social support for those who are unemployed, handicapped or sick. If the family cannot support them, they may depend on charity. Islam, the religion of the majority, greatly encourages people who have to give those who do not, and also says that this will be rewarded by Allah, both here in this life and in the afterlife.

³¹² A Dervish is considered a holy man. He usually does not work in a fixed job and spends his life worshipping Allah and going from place to place. Working in agriculture, which is only three months per year, he spends the rest moving from one place to another. The Dervish wears remarkable clothes – green long garments, or white patchy garments. They were highly respected and people sympathised with them and gave them food, shelter for a short time and clothes.

period. You might refuse to give him anything in a difficult economic situation, or you might give him some food and drink, but he might keep bothering one. Doubt might creep into one's mind: "I heard a knock at the door. I called my daughter to see who was there. She came back and said the Dervish wanted to see me. I was amazed when I went there. I found Abdul Rahaman. He asked for food, we ate together. He told me to get a stick and a torch and tell my wife that I would walk to show him his way".³¹³ Abdul Rahaman was the pseudonym of Nugud, the Secretary General. At the time, the hot issue was how to win the pending trade unions elections. He and my interviewee walked through the dark streets and Abdul Rahaman gave him directives on how to handle certain issues. They left each other somewhere near the cemetery in Omdurman.³¹⁴

Not all cadres were able to maintain their anonymity. For example, on the [Khartoum University](#) campus, four students lived together. Each of them was from a different town. Their concerns, like many newly enrolled students, were to enjoy university life and pass their exams. Politics was not an issue in their daily discussions, but one of the four was working underground and had secured all his documents in the room which they share together. A story told by two of the students recounts how M. was in the underground cadre for years, but only after he felt isolated and bored because he could not enter into any sincere or serious discussion with other students did he disclose the fact that he was an underground cadre to the amazement of his fellow roommates.³¹⁵ However, the main reason for this was that he was put forward by a group of students to be their candidate for the Students' Union. He got his chance and issued a release saying he was an underground cadre.

³¹³ Narrated by Mahjoub Sid Ahmed to the researcher during his exile in Cairo. Mahjoub Sid Ahmed was a prominent Labour leader and trade Unionist and member of SCP. He led the work of Sudan Workers' Trade Unions Federation, the oldest and most effective organisation in union and political issues. Mr Sid Ahmed died in Canada during a visit to a son.

³¹⁴ Story of Mr Mahjoub Sid Ahmed told to the researcher in Cairo.

³¹⁵ Interview with M.

The state security, especially under dictatorial regimes, played and continues to play a pivotal role in unmasking other underground cadres. Usually when such campaigns succeed, the information apparatus of the regime portrays this as the end of the SCP.³¹⁶ The strategies that the Security used have been disclosed by many agents. For example, one agent describes how “We use some of the old tactics, we follow certain communist students. We identify them through what they carry: certain book bags. We follow and observe them until they bring us to a house where someone is hidden.”³¹⁷ Another strategy was to recruit weak elements and let them be the informants. This happened several times. For example, this happened when Ali was arrested. He was an old underground cadre (**Kader Sirie**). When the informant delivered information about the house, the SCP had cleaned the place of all incriminating material, but the Security Police arrived on time to find this old man. Most of the old cadres were not easily recognizable by the security cadres. When the arrest team arrived and found someone with an identification card bearing a name, the team would release him, especially when the arrestee was very old.

Another example was a cadre, who was arrested due to false information given to the police. The house to which the cadre came with his car was a printing house and three underground cadres lived there. Siddig Yousif was responsible for collecting the published material. He usually arrived at a given time, took the completed material and drove away. The people in the residential area had close relationships with each other and were relatives. They refused to rent housing to non-married men. After some months of observation, they told the police that

³¹⁶ For example, during the Numeiri Regime, 1969-1985, many Underground Cadres were arrested and the information campaign about this success portrayed the end of the SCP. An example was when they arrested Tigani Eltayeb in 1980. Also when they stormed the house of a group of printing cadres in 1982. There are many other examples.

³¹⁷ An agent gave this information when he was interrogated in the party assembly.

the house was a distribution point for opium. This was a crime and the police sent a team to arrest the three men. When the police unexpectedly arrived, they found the men busy printing publications. But Siddig Yousif was arrested later as he was not with the other three: “The Security arrested me later. They came to know me through my car number plate. When the Security Police confronted me I denied any relationship with the three cadres. The Security Police released me.”³¹⁸ This example has been given to highlight the importance of communication and contact with cadres’ surroundings and of creating a trustful mutual relationship with neighbours. It is common in some residential areas in towns for old residents, who are usually relatives, to doubt or mistrust new residents without a family. This was not taken into consideration when this house was rented for this group. To solve this problem, the SCP recruited some cadres working in the real estate market. These cadres worked closely with the underground apparatus to secure houses for the cadres. For example, this real estate broker would search the surrounding to see if there were any security threats.

Here is another example, from one of the founders of the party, who was working underground in Medani, the capital of Al-Gezira Province. He said:

In 1950 I was commissioned to work in Medani. When I arrived, I immediately began to form a relationship with employees working in sensitive positions. I chose to recruit a man employed by the judiciary and responsible for land registration. After I recruited him, we lived in the same house. Each day he would bring to me land registration files, which I would work through to find owners, houses for rent and land conflicts. This greatly helped us to establish the work of the Party.³¹⁹

A. Kamarat also said something very interesting: “When we arrive in a town, we try our best to recruit workers in the Telegram and Post Office. We usually succeed. After their

³¹⁸ An Interview with Siddig Yousif, an Underground Cadre.

³¹⁹ Interview with Hasan Salamah, one of the founders of SCP.

recruitment we will have access to all secret communication of the state security police and other information.”³²⁰

The SCP has issued obituaries for several persons during the past few years. In these obituaries the SCP disclosed how those people helped the party in very difficult situations. One of them was a highly placed judge, who had direct contact with the presidential administration, state security and judiciary. The Mufti of the Republic was another notable person quite close to the President and other ministers. His word and Fatwa were very important and were followed by all the State executive, legislative and judiciary units. This man had, according to the SCP, helped the party in very difficult situations after the massacre of 1971 and for years afterwards.³²¹ A most important cadre, albeit not known to any one until his obituary, was Anwar Zahir.³²² He was the organiser who brought the remaining members of Central Committee together in a meeting in [Khartoum North \(Bahri\)](#) in September 1971.³²³ At that time, which was after the execution of many leaders and military officers, there was a witch hunt against the communists led by the State Security Police. The meeting was held and a new Secretary General was chosen. Without that meeting and the efforts exerted by Anwar Zahir, the SCP would never have recovered and continued its activities.

4. 8 Where are Underground Cadres to be found?

The underground cadres and members of the underground apparatus are very diverse. This may lead one to ask how it is possible to conduct research. Information based on what was disclosed by the cadres who deserted this area and began either to work in the open or totally

³²⁰ Interview with A. Kamarat.

³²¹ This was one of the successes of the SCP. Some people say he is an underground cadre, others say he is a sympathiser. All of these people had helped the SCP to survive.

³²² Anwar Zahir was a prominent underground cadre. His role was unknown until disclosed in his obituary.

³²³ [Khartoum North \(Bahri\)](#) is part of the capital of Sudan. The capital consists of three towns separated by the Nile and its tributaries: the White Nile & the Blue Nile. For that reason, it is called the Triangular Capital.

left the SCP has yielded amazing stories. The places in which underground cadres were to be found were also diverse, at least in the past. No information is available about their current whereabouts. Maybe after their death information about their positions and locations will emerge.

A notorious example of where they could be found concerns Major Abu Shibah, the leader of the Republican Guard, who was responsible for ensuring the security of the president and his vice presidents. He was well known for his courage and military discipline. When the SCP faced a fierce state campaign during 1970-71 and the regime began to hunt down the leaders of the SCP, the underground apparatus conducted a broad-based dialogue about how to ensure the security and safety of the then Secretary General of the Party. The Secretary General was at the time being held in one of the military bases in Khartoum. He was heavily guarded, but the Secretary began to behave as a crazed man. A military guard said:

The man used to come out his cell at three in the morning wearing a full suit, and began to smoke. Or he might come out wearing another garment and begin to recite poetry.

Every night he did something different. Sometimes, he never left his cell. After a while we were all accustomed to this disoriented behaviour, so that when he disappeared we did not doubt that he might have escaped.³²⁴

In the end, the task was allocated to the Military Branch of the party. Abu Shibah was then commissioned to perform this task. The Military Branch smuggled out the Secretary General and hid him in a residential room in the Republican Palace, adjacent to the office of the President, the enemy. He placed the Secretary General here until he later decided without consulting his host to leave the palace. The most secure places were those of a senior judge. A group of cadres worked from his home printing much material. The cadres were attached to

³²⁴ Interview with the leader of the guard responsible for escorting and guarding the Secretary General.

the judge's house as house servants, gardeners, etc. (This had been narrated by many cadres.) Furthermore, you might find a cadre working as bus or lorry driver from one town to another in open country. Some of them worked as drivers between Khartoum, Medani, Obeid, Port Sudan and Kassala, etc. They performed certain tasks such as transferring messages from the centre to the towns, or printed material. Usually such cadres were beyond suspicion.

The most famous and strange performance of a party task was carried by the underground apparatus after the 1971 massacre. The cadres were commissioned to spread information all over the country, after the execution of its leaders and the claim by the regime that the SCP had vanished forever. The cadres selected a train whose the conductor was sympathetic towards the SCP. The three cadres bought railway workers clothes. Their train was a goods train. They put their printing machine in a wagon and began their task. From one town to another, they delivered their printed material to a local contact. If they found no one, they spread the printed material out near the most crowded areas, such as hospitals and returned quickly to the train and changed into their clothes as railway workers. According to one of them, they covered all the towns to the West. When they returned they began to do same in the East, North and South.³²⁵ They continued this mission for three months to cover all parts of the country that had a railway line.

Cadres were distributed all over the country in accordance with the SCP's structure and needs. The professional cadres, whether in a town or village, had to have a house. As most of the cadres did not work in the same areas where they had family, there was a need to rent a house. In this case the cadres were not all treated similarly. While some might live in popular residential area, others did not. This was mainly due to the fact that they were well-known and

³²⁵ An Interview with A. Kamarat.

had to live in certain residential areas where the contact with people was very limited or totally impossible, such as living in an upper class residential area. This rule was always applied to leading publicly known cadres. As a general rule, a cadre from a certain town would be transferred to another town. In rural areas, where the cadres came from the same village or nearby town, they had no choice but to be with their families. Also, publishing and printing were usually secured in towns.

4. 9 Escapes

The most recent four famous escapes of cadres from Sudan happened during the current regime. Between June 1989 and 1994, the worst time of the notorious and systemic human rights violations in the Sudan, the four Party leaders were to travel to Cairo and London. They had no passports, no papers in their names. Their photos were everywhere and they were well known. The first case was Dr Izzeldin Ali Amer, a physician, member of the Central Committee and one of the founders of the Party. He walked through the airport, tall with light coloured skin, accompanied by another four persons, all disguised in priests' costumes. Because Dr Amer is light-skinned and speaks English fluently, the underground apparatus used this circumstance to smuggle him via the airport, together with some other Sudanese Christians who sympathised with the party. The success of the operation was disclosed by the Egyptian media when Dr Amer was received by Mubarak, the then President of Egypt. During this period, Egypt supported the Sudanese opposition.

The second important example was that of Tigani Eltayeb. He was taken in a car via the Eastern Highway over one thousand kilometres to Port Sudan, from there to the Egyptian border and from there to Cairo. People who participated in this journey were many, some of them are still living in Khartoum. The third example is when Khatim was commissioned to

travel to Cairo to hold a meeting with the party leaders outside Sudan and deliver messages to the opposition. He was disguised as an old man with a white beard and hair, wearing a short garment and hiding his glasses when they came to search points all the way to Port Sudan. To cover this journey Dr. El-Fatih Hajj El-Tom, a medical officer and his wife, both recently married, alleged that they were going on their honeymoon journey accompanied by their Uncle, Khatim. It needs to be mentioned here that Dr. El-Fatih was not a communist, but a Ba'athist, i.e. is from the Ba'ath political party and he risked his life and the life of his wife to secure the safe travel of Khatim.³²⁶ No more than two hundred kilometres outside the city, the car broke down. After some hours they managed to deal with the problem and continued until they reached Kassala, a town near the Ethiopian border and capital of the Eastern province. There the car broke down totally. The driver, also an underground cadre, left the 'bride and bridegroom' and went with together with Khatim to find a spare part. In the market they found a spare parts shop and asked the shop owner about their needs. When he came to know that they were not from Kassala, he swore that they should lunch with him. "He swears, 'I divorce my wife, you are invited to my home to eat and drink tea'. We tried to apologise, but he once again swore his oath. Then he told us to go to our car and gave us the spare part, the one only available in the market, which he had bought for his own car. He gave it to us free."³²⁷ After repairing the car, they returned to him and he accompanied them to his house where they lunched. After drinking tea, the man gave Khatim a garment, a hat and a turban. They thanked him and drove to Port Sudan. When they reached the town, the driver returned

³²⁶ Elfatih died recently of cancer. His party, the Sudan Ba'ath Party, is an offshoot of the Arab Ba'ath Party and headed by the Iraqi Ba'aths. When he was asked if he could help in the escape of Khatim he said: "I shall sacrifice myself to ensure the safety of Khatim." He then discussed the matter with his wife and they decided to go with him to Port Sudan as bride and bridegroom. They then applied new decorations to their hands and faces to look like newly married couples.

³²⁷ If a man swears he will divorce his wife, you are obliged to accept his invitation, otherwise he really will divorce her. This is a Sudanese custom, supported by Islamic teachings. If you swear to divorce then you are committed to do so. In the case here, if the invitee refused, the inviter is obliged to divorce. Also, from another viewpoint, it is considered the utmost generosity to offer food to strangers and to swear to encourage them to accept your invitation.

and delivered Khatim to the man responsible called GG. GG worked as manager in hotel. At the time, both the deputy head of State Security, Mohamed Atta, and A. Karti, were in this same hotel.³²⁸ The man had to take a decision and he decided to place the disguised Khatim in a room adjacent to that of deputy head. After a day Khatim took his baggage and went to Port Sudan Airport to travel to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He alleged that he was going to visit his sons. His shape suggested that he was very old. At the check point the officer said to Khatim: “Uncle, your shoes are torn, why not buy new ones. You are travelling outside your country.” Khatim answered: “My son, this is life, tomorrow when I reach my sons; they will buy to me new ones. Allah is generous” and the officer stamped his false passport.³²⁹

A fourth example, Shafie Khider was underground in Medani, the capital of Gezira Province, where while walking in the street he had a stroke and fell down.³³⁰ People gathered. He woke up and the people tried to help him. He gave them a piece of paper with a name of a colleague living in the same residential area. The doctor came, but could not recognise Shafie due to his beard and the disguise. But Shafie was able to tell him who he was and the doctor took him in his car and treated him at his home and then contacted someone from the SCP. They immediately transferred him to a private clinic and the SCP decided that Shafie ought to travel for medical care. After he was restored to health, the plan to travel was ready. He arrived in Cairo in 1994; some people said via the airport, others said he came with camel traders. He did not wish to give details about this journey.

4. 10 The Importance of ‘the People’

³²⁸ A. Karti is current Foreign Minister..

³²⁹ Khatim’s story is recorded in his interview.

³³⁰ Interview with Shafie Khider.

Whether travelling, living among people or actively performing party tasks, the surrounding area where the cadre is based and the people in it are a crucial factor in the work of Underground Apparatus. The cadres who had not built relations with their neighbourhood, such as in the case of Siddig Yousif, would endanger themselves and the security of the party. Much evidence shows this simple fact. Sulieman Hamid, or Professor Abdul Rahaman, had lived for years in a traditional residential area and built a 'normal' relationship with the neighbourhood. Such relationships protected them from being under surveillance. The people in Sudan usually sympathize with the weak and with such people as the cadres who are most vulnerable during a crisis. The people protect such cadres by giving them shelter, food, or even bring them information that helps them avoid being arrested.

After the massacre of 1971, many leaders were being pursued so as to stand trial. In the first few days any captured leader was a dead one. For that reason many of them sought shelter with non-communists. Khatim walked with his companion more than sixty kilometres with their one donkey, sometimes he walked and sometimes he rode the donkey. The countryside in the Gezira Scheme area was very dangerous, where snakes and scorpions were prevalent. When they reached their destination, the house of their uncle, Khatim had wounds on his feet and had contracted malaria. His only medicine was to eat as much lemon as possible. Khatim was smuggled by a trade unionist, an engineer called I. A. Rodwan.³³¹ The engineer heard that Khatim was wanted and went to his uncle and told him that he could smuggle Khatim to safety. He drove with his Land rover and picked up Khatim and another companion and hid them among blankets and sheets. He remained in the house of the engineer for weeks. The engineer contacted a communist nurse who supplied bandages, penicillin and disinfectants. After he regained his health, and the execution period ended, he decided to surrender to the

³³¹ Ibrahim Rodwan, was the Minister of Trade 1986-1988. He is a leading member in Unionist Party in Sudan and a Gezira Scheme agricultural engineer.

nearest prison. However, the advice came that he should surrender in a town in another province. The engineer drove with his car to a certain point and left him there.

According to another story, in 1990, when an addict sold information about the whereabouts of Mr Khatim, the officer in charge helped Khatim to escape by passing the information to a friend.³³² The Arrest Team arrived in the place and found Khatim not there. Khatim was smuggled by a sympathiser who took him in his car from where he lived to another place to hide until he got another secure house.

Many of the interviewees emphasised the importance of having good contacts with the people. In this context, the people local meant family, friends, and neighbourhood acquaintances. Those who lived long underground told about how people treated them. A. Ibrahim said, “When you are underground, the people sympathise with you, care about you and give you more attention and regard.”³³³ He further highlighted his point saying, “They consider you as someone who left their way, and created his own way. They want you with them identify with one.”³³⁴ A. Ibrahim was lucky as he received from friends, relatives, family and acquaintance support in different areas, especially in social and cultural matters such as books, newspapers and contact with others.

The fact that Sudan is a multi-ethnic country helped SCP to survive as its cadres used this to secure and safely hide their important cadres. “We were able to secure a prominent SCP cadre for many years with one ethnic groups. He lived among them; they protected him and helped

³³² Whether the officer knew what was at stake is not known. But definitely this information helped to ensure the safety of this important cadre.

³³³ Interview with A. Ibrahim.

³³⁴ *ibid.*

him a lot.”³³⁵ This was repeated in many parts of Sudan. The SCP sent cadres to live with some ethnic groups and benefit from their cultural difference, dialect, and language unknown to others, which they use to communicate with each other and the cadre in time of emergency or danger. Also the cadre would be under their protection, even if within the ethnic group there was a police or security agent, the ethnic group would ask the agent to protect their guest e.g. the cadre.³³⁶ The SCP had a special fraction specialised in recruiting ethnic minorities to the party such the Jewish and Coptic minorities and the Nuba.

4. 11 Cadres’ Standard of Living

Although these cadres are the central nervous system of the SCP, they live in poverty. Compared with their counterparts with the same qualifications their income is far lower. While in the 1950s and 1960s, they received ten to twenty pounds per month, their counterparts received thirty-six and above. Sometimes, they depended on friends for support to live a decent live. The fact that the compensation a cadre might receive was very low was a matter of conflict within the SCP: “My salary at the university was sixty pounds and when I went underground I got only fifteen pounds.”³³⁷ The Editor in Chief of *Al-Midan* had a conflict with the SCP over his salary. In the 1950s he received such a very low salary that he could not even secure decent clothes for himself. “My salary when I was an employee of the government was 30 Sudanese Pounds, but when I was ordered by the party to be an underground cadre my salary dropped to only six Sudanese pounds.”³³⁸ Mr Obeid went further saying that working as a full professional cadre was very difficult as there was not

³³⁵ Interview with Al-Sir Najib.

³³⁶ *ibid.*

³³⁷ Interview with A. Ibrahim.

³³⁸ Interview with Abdullah Obeid.

sufficient money to support them. He also made comparisons between leading and non-leading cadres in terms of standard of living. The former were far better off. However, the majority of the cadres were non-leading individuals and so they had and have a very low standard of living. “The non-leading cadres suffer under poverty and inconveniences,” according to Obeid.³³⁹ The leading cadres had friends among professional practitioners such as doctors, lawyers, engineers and businessmen, who usually supported them and helped them. With this very low salary, the cadre was expected to live and actively work for the party. According to many cadres, they depended on a wide network of friends and families who also helped them with clothes and extra money. This support was crucial and, for a long time, helped the cadres to withstand difficult situations. The cadres’ salaries have remained very low. In a recent conversation with a cadre, he confirmed this fact. If a cadre becomes sick, he might depend on the help of family and friends. Some of them requested family members and friends, outside Sudan, to send them medication such as inhalers and ulcer medication. The cadres had been better off when the Eastern Bloc still existed. At that time, sick cadres were flown to one of the Eastern Bloc countries for treatment.

What really makes things worse for the underground cadres, is that they often cannot get work. As political activists under dictatorial regimes, the risk of being arrested and imprisoned is and was too great. Even in democratic regimes, which were short-lived in the Sudan, they could not take other jobs. This was mainly due to their very busy schedule. An underground cadre might have more than ten meetings a week. If the hours to arrange and prepare for the meeting were taken into consideration, the cadre would have no time even to see his family. The overload of work was and is always a matter of discussion within the

³³⁹ *ibid.*

higher organs of SCP. Sometime the overload of work resulted in cadres leaving the party altogether.

4. 12 Written Contributions

Most of the intellectual underground cadres have contributed written material to the understanding of the SCP. Those contributions differ from one cadre to another. Khatim contributed three important papers: “Time for Change”, “Effective tactics to dismantle the NIF Regime” and “The Crisis of Leadership in the SCP”. As a result of the last contribution, he left the party and established his own party with other ex-communists members.³⁴⁰ A. Ibrahim has said that he only wrote a few papers, one about party education, another about the youth. He also left the party and became a University Professor.³⁴¹ Sulieman Hamid has written a lot: one book about Darfur, three books about the Al-Gezira Scheme, in addition to documentation about the peasants’ leaders in the country.³⁴² Muhammad Ibrahim Nugud, the late secretary general of the SCP, wrote four major contributions, in addition to his editorial article in *Al-Midan*. These books were: “Issues of Democracy in Sudan, ” "Dialogue on the Materialistic Trends in Arab and Islamic Philosophy," "Land Relations in the Sudan: Footnotes on Land Title documents" and "Slavery Relations in Sudanese Society".³⁴³ Other cadres contributed internal written material. Some of the cadres were not asked to write contributions. Those were the cadres specialised in the security of the SCP. Success here is measured by a cadre’s capacity to secure a cadre or houses for a long period of time. Instead of writing, they were requested to train others in the areas in which they were specialised.

³⁴⁰ Interview with Khatim.

³⁴¹ Interview with A. Ibrahim.

³⁴² Interview with Sulieman Hamid.

³⁴³ Mohamed Ibrahim Nugud, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ibrahim_Nugud, accessed February 2018.

4. 13 Humourous Situations

Not all the situations described by underground cadres were tragic; some very dangerous situations had humorous moments. Sulieman has narrated one of these moments.

When we were meeting in a house, the police stormed in and began to search us. The officer asked us where the opium was. At this moment I said we had no opium, we were just here sitting in order to talk. During this time we decided not go to the police station. We had to run when we got outside. Each of us has to run in a different direction. We were four. When we were outside, the police did not notice what we were planning. When the officer said: "Get into the car," we immediately began to run. I ran to East to where there was a large sewage creek. The police shot in the air and shouted: "Hold the thieves...Thieves." While I was running I heard the officer say to a soldier shoot his legs. But the soldier shot in the air, I thought he shot me; I fell inside the creek, when I raised my head I found a group of people around me. I got to my feet and said to the people: "We are not thieves, we are communists."³⁴⁴ The soldier took me back to the car, on the way he said to me: "I did not want to shoot your leg; I shot because I have to obey orders. Why did you not jump the creek? From your features I know that you are not a thief."³⁴⁵

In 1976 after the aborted military invasion of Khartoum,³⁴⁶ A. Ibrahim was living underground in a house shared with a family:

They had an infant who always cried. The police and security were searching every house seeking communists in hiding. When the police stormed the house, jumping over

³⁴⁴ Here Sulieman had behaved correctly. If he had not denied being a thief, the people would beat him before the police arrested him. This might cause his death. When he said we are communists the people tried to help him, but the police arrived at the place and took him.

³⁴⁵ An Interview with Sulieman Hamid.

³⁴⁶ The Military Invasion of July 1976 was perpetrated by the National Front, a coalition of right-wing Sudanese parties, and supported by Libya. The fighters were trained in Libya and armed with very new arsenal. The invasion was led by Brigadier Mohamed Noor Saad, a prominent Sudanese Armed Forces Officer, who was executed after the abortion of the invasion.

the wall and not knocking on the door, I ran to the other part of the house and took the crying infant and acted as if I was his father. After they searched the house I gave the child to his mother.³⁴⁷

Sometimes, a change of daily tasks between the comrades within an underground unit might save them from prison. That happened when two cadres agreed to change the daily routine and the one who was supposed to carry household cleaning had to go to bring papers and food from outside the house. When he left, the police came and seized all that was in the house and his comrade. His comrade's father came to his son in prison, having heard that his son was caught with huge and important possessions, and tried to convince his son: "Just show me where I can find the money you buried." The father believed the media messages sent by the official radio and the state television portraying his son as having a huge amount of money.³⁴⁸

Although, those cadres carried out very important functions and were and are brave men, some of them had ordinary phobias such as fear of domestic animals, cats or dogs or even frogs. That was the case with Shafie and it cost him every now and then hours to reach his destination walking through popular residential areas in Khartoum or **Wad Medani** where he worked as underground cadre.³⁴⁹

4. 14 Concluding Remarks

Due to the word limit I have tackled only some aspects of this important subject. I have many more stories that can be told about the underground. The success of these activities and the cadres involved in them were and are impossible without the support of Sudanese people. For this reason the SCP always focus on improving its relation with the mass of the population.

³⁴⁷ An Interview with A. Ibrahim. **The story point that people cover up for hidden cadres and cooperate to protect them.**

³⁴⁸ Interview with A. Obeid.

³⁴⁹ This is the story of Shafie Khider recounted in his interview.

Although underground cadre activity is heroic and needs a certain type of person to fill the roles, one of the most common pitfalls was accepting members who were not psychologically prepared to become a cadre. This came to the surface when the State Security Police successfully arrested many of them, and this endangered the security of the whole party. Usually those unprepared cadres were those who chose to work underground after being fired from their jobs. Moreover, the heroic work of these people was sometimes destroyed by small anarchistic tendencies or by persons trying to relieve boredom by sitting with others to drink at night, which is called “Gaadah” in Sudan”.³⁵⁰ Some of the cadres were involved in such activities, which led to their arrest and the arrest of others. As a non-written, but agreed upon code of conduct, the SCP and many of the cadres imposed a prohibition on drinking alcohol. The SCP had a long experience of requesting cadres and members to avoid public drinking and the forming of coteries. Both were considered as wasting resources, money, effort and endangering the security of the party and cadre himself. Some of addicted cadres were dismissed, as they could not stop drinking.

While being an underground cadre was very important, the SCP did not give those cadres enough salary to live on. They depended to some extent on support from families. This was very dangerous. Furthermore, those cadres worked for years without having even a short holiday. As told to us by Mr. Sulieman, he only had a holiday after 32 years of underground activities. After this holiday with his family he insisted that the party and the Underground Apparatus apply this to all cadres and give them the chance to have some rest from daily routines. Furthermore, the cadres have no pension. If a cadre leaves the SCP for any reason, e.g. after thirty years of activity, he has to take responsibility to support himself. This is one of

³⁵⁰ A *Gaadah* is a gathering of friends or acquaintances to drink wine. Usually people choose a house where they can sit, drink and eat. If the *Gaadah* is once a week or month, it will not harm anyone, but when it becomes a daily routine then it will lead to dangerous consequences; it draws the attention of security agents and might lead to storming the house. This is one of the routines that some cadres have been involved in.

the weakest points in the party's structure. Sometimes, the cadres might face problems when sharing a house with another family. If this happened and if the family had nothing to do with SCP, they may in times of anger be harmful. Many cases showed that some cadres were arrested due to conflicts in a house, without the cadre being part of the conflict.

Many underground cadres, when they leave the party, enter into very lucrative businesses. Observation shows that many of them are able to build new lives in very short periods of time by collecting information as to where capital and skilled labour are to be focused. Voices have been raised within the party protesting against the 'luxurious life' of leading cadres compared to the standard of living of the ordinary underground cadres. However, details of such protests and their end results remain unknown. Although not disclosed, but we think they centre on salary and living supports such as cars, and refrigerator. Mostly those who protest will leave the party.

Like other women in leading positions in the SCP, the women underground cadres are few in number and still not used to the optimum. However many dangerous jobs were carried out by women as described above. Most of the intellectual cadres have used their time to contribute much written material about politics, coalition, organisational matters, etc. However, their full potential has rarely been fulfilled due to the limits on feminist and debate within the party.

These cadres also contributed articles to the Party newspaper. Another shortcoming, in addition to the negative effects of insufficient democracy within the party was that some of the cadres were totally unmotivated to work as underground cadres. They were forced to do so because they wanted to earn a living. Many of the employees fired from public offices were recruited as cadres, but they were often not really qualified for this function. While as

public officers were qualified enough, in an underground cadre they lack motivations, competence for the function and security knowledge.

In this chapter I have attempted to reconstruct the world and role of underground cadre as the central nervous system of the SCP. My interviews have revealed the extraordinary extent of penetration of the state, business and the even the military and police. The chapter has looked at the various functions of the underground apparatus, covering literature and its distribution, transport, party organisation and specialised section or ‘target groups’ addressing youth, students, women, and trade unions. The insider accounts suggest that the Leninist model adopted by European communist parties also applied to Sudan. As has been stated above, underground cadres could and cannot do without the help of the people. Many ordinary Sudanese citizens have sacrificed much to ensure the security of many cadres, when they had no family or friendship relationship with them. This leads me back to the question of how and why communists managed to survive in an Islamic culture and this is addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Communists and Islam: The Case of Sudan

5.1 Introduction

“The CP should not be allowed to exist in Sudan or any Muslim society. One cannot be a Muslim and communist at the same time. My experience in the Soviet Union convinced me that Marxism is a form of religion and no other religion was recognised or allowed to function in that country. I believe that communism has no future in Sudan or anywhere.” M. Abdul Kareem³⁵¹

One of the most interesting aspects of the development and day-to-day practice of the Sudanese Communist Party is how it has negotiated its relationship with religion. The quote above from Mohammed Abdul Kareem, a leader of ISIS in Sudan, represents one pole of the debate about the relationship between communism and Islam – the pole that declares the two to be totally incompatible. As is well known, religion plays an important role in the Middle East and in many African countries. In Sudan, Islam is dominant except in South Sudan where Christianity and animism predominate. Islam plays a fundamental role in the sense that for a majority of the population forms of Islamic belief and social practices affect every aspect of cultural and social life. In the Sudan, Islam arrived from Egypt in the seventh century through social contact and intermarriage between Muslim merchants and Men of religion and the local population.³⁵² When proponents of Islam came into contact with African peoples, they found that the local population had their own animist beliefs and Islamic leaders did not always

³⁵¹ Interview with M. Abdul Kareem.

³⁵² Mohamed Omer Beshir, *Tariekh Alharak Alwataniah fi Alsoudan 1900-1969* (History of Nationalist Movement in Sudan 1900-1969), Al-Dar Al-Soudaniyah, 1991 (in Arabic), translated by H. Riyad et al., pp. 13-14 (Arabic Version). Also see: Mekki Shibeika, *Al-Swdan-abr-alqrwn*. (Sudan throughout the Centuries), Dar Algiel, Beirut 1991, pp. 29-30.

compel them to abandon these beliefs. This was and is the case in Sudan. As will be shown in this chapter, in Sudan, traditional customs and Islamic religion have long coexisted and many non-Muslim rituals and customs were adapted to the new religion itself. Islam plays a pivotal role in social consciousness, especially the belief in the existence of a God and the tying of the rhythm of the lives of people to this set of beliefs via the organisation of everyday life.

The syncretic dimension of Islam in Sudan, which resulted from the mixing of traditional African and Muslim social customs, produced what is often called popular Islam or 'Islam Shaábi'. It is a type of Islam that is in many ways different from the current practice of Islam in Middle Eastern countries. The combination of African or specifically Sudanese customs and the local understanding of the teachings of Islam led to a situation in which people practiced the teachings and rituals of Islam, but added to or even ignored some aspects of these teachings. Examples of this include the practices of **not fasting in Ramadan** and of drinking wine, including after the last daily prayers, at social events such as marriages. Sudanese culture even includes the making of special forms of alcohol. Alcohol is produced mainly from dates, but also from grapes, for special occasions such as weddings, births and circumcisions. Another example of popular Islam is the non implementation of the *Hudood* i.e., the punishment for violating religious teachings, committing a crime such as stealing, adultery, killing of others, robbery, etc. Such punishments were avoided and not implemented in Sudan until the mid 1980s.³⁵³ In 1983 things began to change when the regime forced through the implementation of Sharia Law.³⁵⁴ While up until then it was commonly known that some of the youth and old men would both drink wine and practice Islamic rituals, more

³⁵³ Shibeika op. cit., pp. 29-92.

³⁵⁴ The September 1983 laws, known as the September Laws, were where the Numeiri Regime, after many years of coalition with Muslim Brotherhood, from 1976 -1985, declared Sharia Law. The laws were Islamic in form, but were criticised by many Islamic leaders inside Sudan. The Brotherhood gained much from this period of coalition and built their significant and highly influential banking and companies system, which played a central role in the coup of 1989 according to many scholarly sources. The Laws implemented only punishment.

recent *fatwas* have pronounced that such behaviour is against Islamic teachings. Yet for average Sudanese people in wide areas of Sudan, this practice is still regarded as normal. Usually a man will wait until he has completed the last prayer at night and then join his friends in drinking. Many Sudanese people think of each of these two practices as separate and according to a number of stories that I have been told in the course of my research, some Imams also drink regularly. In some parts of the Sudan, local wine, a kind of local beer, was served in the house, where even children might take a drink, while adults drank, prayed or recited Quran. Such wine called 'Marisah' is made from Dura sorghum and has low alcohol content. It is considered by the communities as a meal rather than a wine. Such practices persist in some parts of Darfur and Kordofan. In Northern Sudan, on social occasions and feast days such as the Feast of Sacrifice, usually the people brew local wine with very low alcohol content from dates. They call it "shirboot". The *shirboot* is served to all visitors, together with cooked sacrificed meat.

Another example of Sudanese adaptations of Islam to their own local needs is the existence of the *Al-Indaiha* or the local house of wine. This was usually a group of houses or a neighbourhood on the outskirts of a town or a village. The residents specialised in brewing wine and distilling alcohol for sale. Users could visit these houses and buy their wines and stay to drink as in a bar. The visitors could bring with them their own food, usually meat, and the host-housewife would cook it for them. Now these practices have been prohibited by law, but there are underground, secret practices. Another example of non-Islamic practices that flourished until the mid-1980s is legal prostitution. This was found until the mid-seventies in Khartoum and in other parts of the country until 1983. Houses of prostitution, (brothels) were located in most of the big towns in Sudan and prostitutes had legal status, licenses and health

certificates, and they paid taxes. Men could usually visit these houses, as it was considered normal practice for unmarried men.

Many of the customs and practices in Sudanese society, aside from the examples that I have given above, may have facilitated the ease with which the SCP treated the question of religion. Early leaders were well aware that rejecting long-established customs and practices and bringing in new customs without convincing the local people would have definitely resulted in their rejecting the approach of SCP. It was against this backdrop, that the educated and later the political elites began their political parties in Sudan between 1940 and 1946. They had new ideas, but they were enclosed in a society where there were prevailing customs, beliefs and traditions that could not simply be thrown aside.

The Sudanese Communist Party was established in 1946 as the first progressive movement in Sudan dedicated to socialism, modernisation and anti-colonial struggle. As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, Sudan at that time was under **Condominium rule** and like many African and Arabic countries, it was a traditional society. Religion and traditions played a significant and central role in the social life of the country, which was then divided into tribes and ethnic groups. Despite this form of social organisation, there had long been a general feeling of belonging to one nation, especially after the **Al-Mahdist** Revolution of 1885, which expelled the Turkish-Egyptian colonial power, and established independence from 1885-1898.³⁵⁵ In 1899 Sudan passed into joint British-Egyptian rule. Until the mid-1940s economic, political and social underdevelopment prevailed. Illiteracy was widespread and schools were few and

³⁵⁵ Muddathir Abdel Rahim, "Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan: A Study in Constitutional and Political Development, 1899-1956," Oxford, Clarendon Press, (In Arabic published by Dar Alnahr Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1971), pp. 81-119

far between. The number of educated people, mostly men, who had elementary, secondary or college education did not exceed 5,000 in a society of over eight million.³⁵⁶

However, Sudan was not isolated from its neighbouring countries and was therefore affected by cultural, political and social movements in these countries. This was especially true in the case of Egyptian impact. After the failure of the 1919 Revolution in Egypt, a Sudanese movement was established and began to attract some of the Sudanese elites. In 1924 a bloody confrontation ended this movement. As described in Chapter 2, for a long period the elites were not able to re-establish any true political movement until the mid-1940s. The social and cultural clubs established by the elites in the 1930s were also venues where political and social agendas were discussed. The important element in this political and social movement was the rise of two important sects that played a pivotal role in the social, economic and political life of the Sudanese society. They were both based upon religious tenets. One was the Al-Mahdist Sect³⁵⁷, called Ansar, and led by Al-Mahdi family. The other was the Khatmiya sect, called Unionist, and led by the Mirghani family and it was a Sufi based sect.³⁵⁸ Each of these sects has its followers in different parts of the country. These sects also found followers within the educated elite. Since then all Sudan politics have been entwined with and influenced by religion. Any new political party established in Sudan either had a directly religious agenda or could not declare openly its secularism. However, many progressive

³⁵⁶ This small group was originally trained to assist the colonial administration. They were spread all over the country and were under direct supervision of their English superiors. See

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_past_and_future_population Accessed on 20-02-2018.

³⁵⁷ The Mahdist movement in Sudan was founded in 1881 to fight against the Khadivate of Egypt which had been in power in Sudan since 1821. In 1885 it succeeded in overthrowing the Ottoman-Egyptian administration establishing a "Islamic and national" government based in Omdurman.

³⁵⁸ The Almahadi Family is descended from the Mahdi who led the Revolution of 1885 and expelled the Turko-Egyptian occupiers and established the Mahadist State with the borders of current Sudan. It existed from 1885-1898, when it was conquered by the British Army. The Khatmiya are a Sufi family headed by a religious man who has had followers in the Eastern and Northern part of the country. Originally they came from the Hejaz, Saudi Arabia, but had a strong relation with Egypt. They establish their organisation and practiced the teaching of the Quran.

parties, and the SCP is one of them, have coexisted with religion. The SCP did not publish any directives to its members against religion, nor prohibit its members from practicing their religion, whether Muslim, or members of minority religions such as Christians, Jews or religions based on traditional local beliefs. My oral history research and my own observations and reflections suggest that a broad tolerance of religion continues to influence the attitude of Sudanese communists towards Islam and their view of it as wholly acceptable within their party, even though religion is contrary to the teachings of orthodox Marxism.

5.2 Religion and the Establishing of the Communist Party

Political parties are usually an expression of specific aspects of the social struggle in a particular country and they manifest the different social interests they represent. The political parties established in the 1940s amid the struggle of the Sudanese people against British colonialism belonged to different schools of thoughts and most of them were religious-based. As described above, the two big parties, the Unionists and Umma, were both established around a religious leader and based upon religious sects. In contrast, as argued in detail in Chapter 2, the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) was established on the basis not of religion but of Marxist ideas largely acquired variously via contacts with Egyptian and British communists. However utopian it called for the complete eradication of colonialism and underdevelopment and the independence of the Sudan and downplayed the contradictions between Marxism and religion.

From its inception the SCP was different from other parties in many ways. First, it was based upon a new ideology for the Sudan, different from those parties founded on tradition and religious thinking. The SCP was ostensibly based upon forms of progressive and non-religious political thought. Secondly, as described in detail in Chapter 2, the traditional parties

were led by a Sheikh, that is a religious leader, while the SCP was and is led by a group of activists. Thirdly, the traditional parties had no written programme and no bylaws to govern the membership, in contrast to the SCP. The SCP adopted many aspects of Marxism-Leninism as the theory that would guide its activities. Using this theory at that time helped the party to produce what they regarded as a sound socio-economic and political analysis of Sudanese society and gave the communist members a kind of prominence among other politicians. In high schools and university colleges, the few communist members were very prominent. This attracted the youth who were seeking new ideas and change in a stagnant society.

However, the SCP also faced dilemmas that any progressive or democratic political party faced at that time. These included how to call for social change, socialism or democracy when these terms were considered by many to be anti-tradition and anti-religion. Another dilemma was how to convince the population, and also political rivals, that the communists' activities were not directed at destroying the values of society as it existed and that they were not against religion. Thus the SCP faced two real problems: (1) how to confront and/or adapt the Marxist approach to religion in a society where it is central to the life of the people and (2) how to convince people that socialism and communism respected existing beliefs. These two questions would remain central issue in the SCP throughout its history since the SCP's opponents have frequently utilised these issues in their attempt to scare people away from the party. In analysing the relationship between the SCP and religion, this chapter depends primarily on interview material, as no substantial written materials can be found on this topic. While information regarding historical events was found in diverse sources, it covers stand alone events not connected to the question of religion with which I am dealing here.

5.3 Marxism/Leninism, the SCP and Religion

The SCP was established in a traditional society with a bare subsistence economy that had a very tiny industrial labour force and where most of the population were peasants. From the start it faced the challenge of solving the contradiction between the Marxist standpoint towards religion and the SCP's adoption of Marxist theory and its endeavour to apply it in such a strongly religious environment. From the beginning the SCP expressed a standpoint, in different publications and in public meetings that applied Marxism creatively to the conditions in Sudan. This meant taking social, political and economic factors into consideration. The SCP leadership did not see any contradictions in this. While Marx argued in his early writing that: "For Germany, the criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo,"³⁵⁹ it is really doubtful that this is what the young Sudanese intelligentsia thought to be appropriate for Sudan. Many intellectuals in Sudan, especially opponents of communism, had found justifications in this aspect of Marxism for their fight against the SCP. Yet their views were not reflected in the attitudes or practices of the Sudanese communists themselves. One of the most frequent quotes used by opponents, in particular the Muslim Brothers and right-wing parties, to fight SCP was: "Religion is the opiate of the people". Taking it out of its context, the rivals of the SCP used it to deter the people from listening to the SCP or engaging in any dialogue with communist activists. However, the SCP's early members were from the same Sudanese environment as their opponents and knew very well the customs, traditions and sensitive areas of local people. From a purely academic point of view one has to say that Islam can create a meaningful identity and does have to be fundamentalist or support jihad (ISIS).

³⁵⁹ Karl Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1843-44", Cambridge University Press, 1970. Ed. Joseph O'Malley, translated by: Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley. The Introduction. See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/index.htm>

Lenin confirmed the Marxist standpoint on religion as follows:

Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses of the people, over-burdened by their perpetual work for others, by want and isolation. Impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle against the exploiters just as it inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better life after death, as impotence of the savage in his battle with nature gives rise to belief in gods, devils, miracles, and the like. Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth, and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. But those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practise charity while on earth, thus offering them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and selling them at a moderate price tickets to well-being in heaven. Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.³⁶⁰

That the SCP did not and does not conceive of religion as a form of spiritual oppression is evident from the interviews that I have conducted with its leaders. Many of these leaders believe in life after death and even some religious leaders sometimes offered tacit support to communists. For example, Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman recalled in an interview with me:

When I was recruited to the Party, my father heard that and discussed the matter with me. His reaction was: 'Son look deep. If you become a communist what about your religion?' I told him that: 'Father, I have seen the communists, they pray and fast, and no one has asked me or any of my colleagues to leave our religion. When we meet and

³⁶⁰ V. I. Lenin, "Collected Works", Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, [Volume 10](#), pages 83-87. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/dec/03.htm> Socialism and Religion p. 83

there is call for prayer, they stop the meeting and we go to say our prayers.' He said:

'Son do not lose your religion and be very careful.'³⁶¹

It was not only in the area of religion that Sudanese communists disagreed with some Marxist and Leninist writing. For example, while Lenin considered the capitalist to be an oppressor, the SCP has had a group of members who were capitalists and were considered as part of the progressive vanguard. The problems and issues facing the Sudan were very different from 20th-century Europe. The very real need to attract and engage both the small intelligentsia with its anti-colonial aspirations and the largely rural population with very little formal education of any kind except possibly in a Madrasa, elementary schools, meant that Sudanese communists needed to form different sets of alliances that took account of the local situation. These were very far from those described by Lenin in his writings on the modern class conscious worker in industrialised West:

The modern class-conscious worker, reared by large-scale factory industry and enlightened by urban life, contemptuously casts aside religious prejudices, leaves heaven to the priests and bourgeois bigots, and tries to win a better life for himself here on earth. The proletariat of today takes the side of socialism, which enlists science in the battle against the fog of religion, and frees the workers from their belief in life after death by welding them together to fight in the present for a better life on earth.³⁶²

The strategic approach of the SCP was intrinsically Marxist in its attention to the specificity of the society in question and to the historical moment in the development of that society. There were also aspects of Leninist writing on religion that were largely compatible with Sudanese society. For example, Lenin argues further that:

³⁶¹ Interview with Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman who was a member who worked among students and youth for a long time. He also told me about his relation with many SCP leaders and confirmed that none of the leaders was atheist or declared this openly.

³⁶² Lenin, op. cit.

Religion must be declared a private affair. In these words socialists usually express their attitude towards religion. But the meaning of these words should be accurately defined to prevent any misunderstanding. We demand that religion be held a private affair so far as the state is concerned. But by no means can we consider religion a private affair so far as our party is concerned. Religion must be of no concern to the state, and religious societies must have no connection with governmental authority. Everyone must be absolutely free to profess any religion he pleases, or no religion whatever, i.e., to be an atheist, which every socialist is, as a rule.³⁶³

While the SCP endorsed the idea that religion was a private affair far as the state was concerned, in contrast to Leninism, it insisted on freedom of religion even for party members. SCP policy and practice over the decades has generally been consistent in this respect. In declaring religion to be a fully private affair, the party could reconcile itself to the realities of everyday life in the Sudan. While this remains central to the approach of the SCP to the question of religion, it became more difficult after the mid-1980s with the rise of Saudi influenced Salafism in the Sudan. The implementation of Sharia law by the state undermined the principle of secularism. Not only did this change the complexion of Islam in the Sudan, it also affected day-to-day living practices, challenging the syncretism that had existed for centuries. It made a particular version of Islamism the basis of the state and the position articulated in the quote from Dr M Abdul Kareem at the beginning of this section on the total incompatibility between Islam and Marxism became orthodoxy.

From its inception and until now the SCP has remained largely faithful to the traditions of 'the people' and played its politics within the boundaries dictated by social and religious norms. Occasionally these politics have diverged from these norms, but usually to a limited extent.

³⁶³ Lenin, op cit.

Periodisation is useful in understanding the evolution of the standpoint of the SCP on religion because each period of the country's political and social development has had real implications for the practice of the party, affecting SCP activists in different ways. Each period was burdened with different struggles related to economic, social, and political development, and the level of development of political awareness among the Sudanese people. In my research I have identified three distinct periods, which reflect the responses and development of SCP in its approach to questions of religion, within its overall struggle to implement its programme. However, this periodisation has been made only to facilitate analysis, because in real struggle on the ground, political, social and economic development cannot be easily demarcated by historical periodisation.

5.4 The Early Years: 1946-1971

This was the period of the establishment of the party. It was marked by the recruiting of leaders and spearhead activists, developing the party infrastructure, and presenting and popularising the SCP's image and programme. This process involved convincing 'the people' that a Sudanese communist is like any other Sudanese person, i.e. that he or she is a product of the same environment, that he or she is brave, holds to the local customs and fulfils his or her religious practices. This period also witnessed the first anti-communist campaigns from both the opponent political parties, such as the Muslim Brothers, and the British Colonial Administration in Sudan together with the Egyptian Intelligence Agency in Egypt.

The period 1946-1971 can be divided into sub-periods marked by the origins, development and proliferation of the party. The first founders of the SCP focused on the struggle against **Condominium rule** and on recruiting people who could support the party especially from among students, labourers and peasants. The programme centred on the call for self-

determination, the independence of the Sudan, and for social and economic development. With this clear and specific programme, the SCP was able to recruit many of its leaders. The issue of religion was never a real question and even when opponents tried to use religion against the SCP, they failed. The SCP utilised Islam to reach the otherwise unreachable peasants, since at the time almost all of them were illiterate. For example, the party's first spokesman Hasan Al-Tahir Zarrouq commented on the lessons to be learned from the Soviet Union, as follows:

We may benefit from the Soviet experience, but we are going to avoid its shortcomings such as absence of guarantees of individual freedom and integrity, and lack of appreciation of the role of religion in the lives of people.³⁶⁴

This position remained the central and core approach of the Sudanese communists to the question of religion.

That the SCP was conformist in its attitude towards the question of religion surprised communists from elsewhere. The SCP was closely connected to the Egyptian Communist Movement but the differences were clear. For example, Sudanese student members of the SCP recounted that the Egyptians were surprised to see the comrades stop a meeting and pray: 'We were connected to the cell where an Egyptian came to meet with us. We held our meeting in the Zoo Park in Giza. We stopped for prayer and our Egyptian brother looked at us in surprise'.³⁶⁵ In the early years, the SCP organised events and seminars which usually began with the recitation of the Quran. My interviewees confirmed that this was the general practice as regards meetings in Sudan at the time and the SCP was no different from other Sudanese organisations in this respect. When the party leaders decided to announce the party's name

³⁶⁴ New Sudan Newspaper, 1 September 1944.

³⁶⁵ Ahmed Sulieman, *Mashinaha Khotah* (Footsteps We Walked Together), Two Parts, Dar Elfikr Printing & Publishing, Khartoum, Sudan, 1983 & 1986.

officially as the Communist Party in 1956, they began their communiqué with a Quranic verse recited by Gasim Amin, the President of the Communist Party and a labour leader:³⁶⁶

By the pen and what they inscribe, You are not, [O Muhammad], by the favour of your Lord, a madman. And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted. And indeed, you are of a great moral character. So you will see and they will see which of you is the afflicted [by a devil]. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has gone astray from His way, and He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided. Then do not obey the deniers. They wish that you would soften [your position], so they would soften [towards you]. And do not obey every worthless habitual swearer [and] scorner, going about with malicious gossip – a preventer of good, transgressing and sinful, cruel, moreover, and an illegitimate pretender.³⁶⁷

The party's opponents at the time were very weak compared to the few well organised, devoted, and highly active members of the SCP. The SCP exerted energy in every work place and residential area in order to build small cells that could actively participate in the life of the people. The SCP used various tactics to access rural communities. Indeed according to one of the founders of the party, this might involve marriage and settlement in the area. In my interview with Gazoli Said, he gives the example of [Sheikh Al-Khier](#), a prominent farmers' leader, a communist and *Fakih* (that is someone who practices traditional medicine using the teachings of the Quran). In addition to pursuing the agenda of the communist party, Al-Khier also taught people in the village where he lived the Quran and the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet). He served as problem solver for the villagers and the neighbouring villages. Further, he was the marriage registrar and gave his blessing to newly wedded couples. Said relates:

³⁶⁶ Gasim Amin, Speech when declaring the new name of the Party in 1956. Interview with A.Kamarat.

³⁶⁷ Surat Al-Qalam. Verses 1-13.

Our aim and concern at the time was to establish and consolidate the existence of the party among the peasants. Simultaneously we wanted them to accept and endorse the opinions and the thoughts of the party without aversion as usually happen. For this reason the party decided to use Sheikh Al-khier for this purpose. Because he was near the traditions and customs of the peasants and at same time he was a religious man.

When he came to a village, he would meet the chief of the village or tribe. After a while he would ask him if he had daughters, if they were unmarried and he would choose the oldest and marry her. By this marriage he would open up every closed door in the region and he would be considered one of them. In the village called Wad Birimah, in the Blue Nile Province at the time, and currently the Blue Nile State, in the Sinar area, he lived and continued all his activities as SCP member and farmer.

After a while he would build a small Zawiya (prayer space). Further, he would begin his practice by treating the peasants using the Quranic practice of *Mihaya*.³⁶⁸ Alongside his work, as a traditional healer, he also worked as a farmer. After each prayer, for which he was usually the Imam, because he could read and write, he would present the views and thoughts of the party to the peasants. He was always near the hearts of the peasants. In a short period, the party had built a strong and effective existence among the peasants which has lasted since the fifties”³⁶⁹

The tactics used by the SCP in its first phase in industrialised areas were very different. The SCP allied itself with the work force and worked to establish the labour movement (the trade unions). The SCP’s prominent leader El-Shafie Ahmed Al-Sheikh, was a founding member of

³⁶⁸ *Mihya* is a sort of Quran water. The Sheikh writes Quranic Verses on a wooden slab -and then washes it with water and gives it to the patient to drink or wash with. It is believed that it cures the patient. *Mihayah* is used for both physical and psychological sickness.

³⁶⁹ Interview with Gazoli Said, one the founders of the SCP and a prominent leader.

the trade union movement. The approach of the party at this time is described in an interview with Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman, a SCP Central Committee member, and a son of worker, who lived in Atbara, an important city for the Labour Movement due to the presence of the Mustafa. Here once again the relationship between party leaders and religion was very close. Suleiman described how: "I was recruited to the SCP in 1948, and my father was a well-known Sheik, but he had a very strong relationship with the SCP labour leaders. He was responsible for the library from which the communists borrowed books."³⁷⁰ Not only did most of the leaders of the SCP believe that there is no contradiction between the teaching of religion, especially Islam, and their programme, Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, a prominent leader, senior editor and journalist, observes: "The Front, later the SCP, was established to struggle against colonialism, for self-determination and social progress. So we did not see any conflict between the SCP programme and our beliefs. No one advocated atheism."³⁷¹ Although Mahjoub left the party in the fifties, he still defends the case of the SCP and its approach to religion. He draws a distinction between home produced party members and those SCP members who studied in Egypt. In his view the latter were more or less concerned with the philosophical part of Marxism. He argues: 'They were influenced by the Egyptian Communist movement and they adhered to philosophical Marxism and applied that in their approach. Most of them are atheists'.³⁷²

Another of my interviewees, Dr Farouk Ibrahim, has an explanation for the stand of the SCP on religion:

If we look at the SCP from a social and economic point of view then there is no contradiction between Islam and the SCP. But if we consider the SCP as a philosophical

³⁷⁰ Interview with Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman.

³⁷¹ Interview with Mahjoub Mohammed Salih.

³⁷² *ibid.* The same idea about the impact of Egyptian Communism on some of the SCP's members, especially, those who studied in Egypt, is still held by many of the old as well as current members.

club then we can speak about contradictions. The SCP is a party for social progress and for that reason there is no contradiction between its programme and the beliefs of the people.³⁷³

In making this comment, Ibrahim focuses on similarities in basic values as regards the distribution of wealth and resources of the type outlined in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. The SCP avoided discussing more fundamental contradictions between religion and communist thought. It concentrated on explaining how communism was compatible with and a part of Sudanese society and strongly advised the members to respect religions. In addition to this, some members and even leaders of SCP practised the religious rituals. In their activities they use some revolutionary Quranic verses that supported their aims. This tactic convinced a lot of people to join the party. In this way the SCP planted communist ideas in Sudanese society without mentioning the points in Marxism that contradict religions. The same leader told his personal story of when he was confronted by his father, a prominent judge at the time in 1952, who attacked him as a Communist, atheist, and non-believer and ordered him to leave the party. Dr Farouk replied: "I believe in Allah, his messenger, his books, his angels, and other prophets". The overriding aim and concern at the time was to establish and consolidate the existence of the party among the workers and peasants.

In the 1950s, the party was only ten to fifteen years old. During this period, opponents tried to intimidate potential members, in particular workers and peasants to prevent them from supporting the SCP. However, the SCP cadres were so closely rooted in communities with the local people that most of the time they were defended by them. A current member of the SCP

³⁷³ Interview with Dr Farouk Ibrahim. He is prominent communist leader who was recruited in the late 1940s and led the student activities. He was elected as member of the Central Committee until 1970 and then he left and remained outside the party, but continued in dialogue with the party leadership.

Central Committee reflected in his interview on the early period and the methods of disinformation used to alienate ordinary people from the communists saying:

The people in that quarter were suspicious about our behaviour and morality. They would spy on us and try to discover whether we pray, fast or not. My friends, who came from the boarding school to visit me at home, were very polite with scrupulous morality. We usually went together to the Mosque to say the Friday prayers. Some of the people in the quarter had fomented a rumour saying that the communists were porno lovers and that they practice sex with their sisters.³⁷⁴

On the other hand, while the workers and peasants were illiterate and mostly did not know how to read or write, they trusted the party representatives. Many party members had joined because they felt there to be no contradiction between communism and Islam, “which was their own religion”.³⁷⁵

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, many of the interviewees speak about how at each public colloquium, seminar or festival, the SCP would begin proceedings with recitation of the *Quran*. In a similar vein, the membership would suspend the meetings and deliberations to say prayers: “It is a commonly accepted practice to begin with reciting Quran.” and “Usually the meetings were held in the evening and when the members heard the call for prayer, they would suspend the meeting to say the prayer.”³⁷⁶ While it is impossible to know for sure in all cases whether this was a sign of positive adherence to Islam or strategic behaviour, it is clear that for many of my interviewees, Islam complemented their commitment to socialism. Sudanese communists at the time did not try to divert the population away from existing social customs and traditions. Simultaneously, the SCP targeted leading, well-known religious

³⁷⁴ Suleiman Hamid, member of the Central Committee is one of the old professional cadres. He is still active as a leading figure.

³⁷⁵ Various interviews confirm this point, the wording here are from the Kamarat interview.

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*

men and recruited them to the ranks of the party. This reflected the core approach of the SCP towards the question of religion. This was even more strongly reflected in the recruiting of two leaders of the fundamentalist religious group known as *Ansar Alsunnah* (Supporters of the Sunnah).³⁷⁷ The first of these two men was Alamin Mohamed Alamin, who “was an intellectual, a graduate of a religious school and connected to the intelligentsia, a member of the peasants’ movement and very pious. He was recruited to the ranks of SCP”.³⁷⁸ Sheikh Alamin was one of the Sunnah Group. The second was his friend, also a peasant, Yousif Ahmed Almustafa, and both eventually left the group and joined the SCP. Their view was that the *Ansar Alsunnah* was only for religious teachings and the new movement, meaning the SCP, was a movement calling for equity, demanding rights for the oppressed.”³⁷⁹ Sheikh Alamin became a Minister after the 1964 revolution in which the trade unions and farmers organisations played a central crucial role. Both men later became members of the Central Committee and were very influential among the farmers.

Many religious judges were also leading members of the SCP. These men deal with questions about beliefs and resolve social problems such as divorce. Some judges were also members of the SCP and even occupied leading posts in the legal section. I mention here Judges Hasan Boudani and Rashid Nayil, both of whom have been members of the Central Committee. While they were also working as judges, they practiced, like typical Sudanese Muslims, prayer, fasting and adherence to the teaching of Islam.³⁸⁰ This can be explained by the general

³⁷⁷ *Ansar Alsunnah* literally ‘Supporters of Sunnah’, the practices and sayings said to be of the Prophet Mohamed. The *Ansar Alsunnah* is an extremely fundamentalist group who adhere literally to what is in The Quran and Sunnah. They call for the establishment of an Islamic society where all Islamic laws are implemented. They also call for the separation of men and women, prohibit women from work, and from going outside the house.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Suleiman Hamid.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Yousif Ahmed Almustafa. Sheikh Alamin was the Secretary General of Gezira Scheme Farmers’ Union, while Yousif was also a leading figure. They were both members of the SCP Central Committee until 1970.

³⁸⁰ Judge Boudani is well known as the Red Judge. He was one of the prominent intellectuals and he led for a long time the Peace and Human Rights Movement during the period from 1948 to the 1980s. While Judge

attitude of the SCP leadership and their understanding of the question of religion in an underdeveloped society. It was also important, given the ways that opponents sought to attack the party. In the period from the founding of the party until 1971, the SCP was attacked by different groups of opponents who accused the communists of being atheist and against Islam. But such campaigns did not succeed in undermining the SCP or its members. This was in part due to the commitment of SCP members who proved themselves dedicated to the cause of 'the people' as understood by Marxists. Moreover, party cadres fought bravely for the end to colonial rule. Their lack of fear of authority helped bring them recognition and status in the eyes of ordinary Sudanese people.

Ahmed Al-Mustafa Ahmed Abu A'aqla was a founder of the SCP in the Halaween area – a very famous village in the Al-Gezira Irrigation Scheme that was discussed in Chapter 2. It is also a place that is well known as a centre for Ansar followers. In his interview he recalled how:

I found myself a communist through my membership in the farmers' movement, where we found only communist political activists and they guided us. It is true that our region is pro-Ansar, but the peasant question was related to the political situation and the SCP had given this question a special degree of basic attention and concern in its programme.³⁸¹

This view of the party reflects the fact that the SCP leadership worked tactically among the farmers and peasants and that the SCP since its inception had paid particular attention to the agricultural question as the basic means of subsistence in the country at the time.

Rashied was a well known and respected judge, he wrote about the Muslim Brotherhood and criticised the movement for utilising Islamic teachings for its own earthly ends. His warnings about the ways the Muslim Brotherhood makes gains in politics have subsequently come true. He said of them: "The Muslim Brothers are the enemies of Allah and his prophets."

³⁸¹ <http://www.halaween.net/press.php?action=show&id=16> Interview conducted by Hasan Warag. Accessed 01-09-2015.

Furthermore, this also reflects the capabilities of SCP to plan, review and find new areas for further activities. *Although Islam forms religion of the people* in the Gezira area, Sudanese society was overall increasingly tolerant, forgiving and liberal as reflected in the words of Mr Ahmed:

Look, the exploitative use of religion and Islam was at that time non-existent... It was introduced by the Muslim Brothers because they had no way of separating the SCP from the people except by this means. Furthermore, I swear to Allah, the SCP had never prohibited us from praying or insisted that we leave our religion in order to become members. Those people are liars, I am sorry that those who are alleged to be clergy are the greatest liars. Our problem at the time was never a question of religion in our struggle to realise our demand to have a dignified life; they were allied to the Sultan, as governor and have been paid.³⁸²

Among the opponents of the SCP was the Colonial Administration, which had enacted laws to fight communism. The SCP was however able through its good organisation and tactics, to minimise the impact of these laws. Yet, after independence the party entered into conflicts with opponents, especially after the coup of 1958 and as a result of this, many of the leaders of the SCP were brought to trial and sentenced to prison.

As a result of the SCP's approach to the political situation in the Sudan, the 1950s witnessed an increase in the number of members of the SCP, from a mere 100 to some 500 or more. During this period the party, which up until 1955 was known as HASITO, was renamed the SCP. On this occasion the Head of the Central Committee, Mr. Al-Shafie Ahmed, a prominent labour leader, addressed the audience citing Quranic verses. This is a further

³⁸² In Ahmed Sulieman, *Mashinaha Khotah* (Footsteps we walked Together), Two Parts, Dar Elfikr Printing & Publishing, Khartoum, Sudan, 1983 & 1986. Ahmed Suleiman, an ex-communist leader and later a Muslim brother, left the SCP in 1970 after an ideological struggle within the Party and joined the Numeiri Regime.

illustration that the SCP did not have a hostile position towards religion. The first generation of communist members – almost all of them – treated religion as a purely personal matter. The freedom of the member to believe in what he or she wished was never compromised. During this period the SCP had many members who were Sheikhs, Imams and healers, in addition to a small number of Christians and Jews, who usually practiced their religious rituals without hesitation, even stopping meetings to perform such rituals as prayers.

In the 1960s, the SCP continued its struggle against the military junta and contributed to its downfall in 1964. The SCP had suggested the idea of conducting a political strike and civil disobedience. After the fall of the military regime, the SCP was able to win twelve seats out of 233 in the newly elected parliament, as compared to one seat in the 1950s. But this victory did not last long and it was religion that would bring about the downfall of the party. In 1965 a young student, alleged to be member of the SCP, ascended a public debate platform in the Faculty of Education and insulted the Prophet and his wives. The Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of the situation and resorted to the streets and began to incite hatred against the SCP. This ended in the expulsion of the twelve members from the parliament and the disbandment of the SCP.

The first reaction of the SCP to this incident was recorded in a public statement where the SCP used the *Quran* to prove its standpoint. “O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.”³⁸³ The SCP denied any affiliation with the said student,³⁸⁴ but the opponents of SCP were ready for the kill. The Muslim Brothers had

³⁸³ The Holy Quran, Sura 49 (Hujrat), verse 6.

³⁸⁴ The Faculty of Education Student was called Shawgi Ahmed Ali. It was said that he was a SCP member.

found their chance to give their old enemy the “final kick”.³⁸⁵ They published a statement calling on people to defend their religion and honour. Ali Abulallah Yaqoub, a Muslim Brother, agitated among the masses, dramatised the words of the student and called for the smashing of the SCP.³⁸⁶ Even the most liberal Islamic leaders saw their chance to benefit from these events and the situation that followed from them. Saddig Al-Mahdi, a young politician from the Al-Mahdi family, who was aspiring to be a Prime Minister at the time, joined forces with the Muslim Brothers and attacked the SCP.³⁸⁷ Dr Hasan Al-Turabi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and lecturer in constitutional law,³⁸⁸ attacked the SCP based upon what the student had said: “We have to get out and eradicate this infection today and not tomorrow.”³⁸⁹ Neither Hasan Al-Turabi nor others involved have ever apologised for what they later confessed to be strategies to hinder the spread of the SCP and intimidate people to prevent them from supporting the SCP. In November 1965 crowds attacked the SCP headquarters in Khartoum and other towns and a strong hostile feeling was fomented against the SCP and its members. After the SCP lost seats in the parliament, the party changed the name under which it participated in the next elections in 1968. The SCP was able to win one seat for its Secretary General, Abdelkhalig Mahjoub who stood as a candidate for the Sudanese Socialist Party.

With this event the period of the rise of the SCP, its proliferation and recruitment came to a sudden end and the SCP began to struggle for its existence as a legal party. Although the SCP had been able since its inception in 1940s to benefit from and use religion, in the end religion

³⁸⁵ The Muslim Brothers Press Release published in various newspapers and pamphlets.

³⁸⁶ One of the Muslim Brothers, who was an inciter of the masses to attack the SCP members’ homes and chase out its members.

³⁸⁷ Mr Saddig Al-Mahdi, in the *Miethak* Newspaper (The Charter), published by the Muslim Brothers. Various issues during 1966.

³⁸⁸ Turabi was for a short time a lecturer at the Faculty of Law, University of Khartoum.

³⁸⁹ Suleiman, *Mashinaha Khotah* (Footsteps we walked Together). No page number available.

was successfully used against it. Although the SCP reiterated in its press release that: “Islam reinforces socialist thinking. Therefore, the socialist system we are advocating is based upon complete respect for the beliefs of the human being”,³⁹⁰ such statements were powerless in the face of the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies and external pressures on the party. The Voice of America also took up the anti-communist campaign and agitated for the people to attack the communists and persecute them. Furthermore, it supported the parliamentary motion to expel the members and to ban and disband the SCP.³⁹¹ The radio station broadcast this message repeatedly and was supportive of the Muslim Brothers’ demand not only to ban the party but also to arrest its members. A few years later in 1969, the military junta adopted all the programmes and slogans of the SCP, at least to begin with. But the SCP rejected the coup and its Central Committee issued a press release condemning it. This communiqué opened a period of hostility that ended with the massacre of the leaders of the SCP in 1971.

5.5 The SCP, Religion and Women Leaders

Historically, the status of women in Sudanese society was very low. They worked in the home and in agriculture. Sudanese communities in all parts of the country were extremely conservative so even in more developed regions, women were rarely given the chance to drive cars, work in the public and private sectors, enter schools and universities, join political parties, or be singers. Most of women just stayed at home occupied with domestic duties. When the SCP was established very few women received any formal education and this was limited to the daughters of elites in Khartoum and other major towns in Sudan. As the SCP saw itself as a liberation movement for both men and women, the SCP leadership showed a great deal of interest in recruiting women and girls to its ranks. However, strategies for

³⁹⁰ The public statement, in 1965, with a quotation from the Constitution of the SCP, 1967, page 35.

³⁹¹ Voice of America, November 1965. See: <https://www.alrakoba.net/articles-action-show-id-57255.htm>. Accessed on 01-09-2015.

recruiting women were confronted with many difficulties. First, religion and customs prohibited women from mixing with men. Secondly, a woman's status at the time was largely confined to household activities. Furthermore, the Sudan was an underdeveloped society where people depended on a subsistence economy, which laid heavy burdens on women. Despite these difficulties as regards the non-educated classes, the SCP was able to recruit a small number of leading educated women. For example, Dr Khalidah Zahir was the first female medical student, first woman to organise women to participate in politics and trade unions and the first to lead a demonstration in 1940s. Dr Zahir, as a SCP activist, established with other young women a party women's association and began to recruit girls in secondary schools and at the university to the women's association. Dr Zahir was also married to the brother of the Secretary General of SCP, which enhanced her status in a male dominated party. Another prominent women leader was Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim. She was a daughter of a religious judge and a sister of prominent communists. Her brother, poet Salah Ahmed, was a leading figure in SCP. Fatima became the Secretary General of the Sudanese Women's Union, a progressive women's organisation, which was a coalition between the communists and democratic activists. She was member of the Central Committee of SCP and President of International Women's Union until 1994. Fatima was married to the Secretary General of the Labour Union Association, Mr Shafie Ahmed Al-Sheikh. As can be seen from these examples, family connections played an important role for aspiring women activists and leaders.

Both these women held opinions on politics and religion that complemented those of their male counterparts successfully combining Islam and the struggle for socialism in their practice. In an interview Dr Zahir explained: "Islam is not against women. It calls for their

liberation"³⁹² She adhered to the general points raised by the SCP and its leadership regarding religion and considered the campaigns against the SCP that used religion as their basis or claimed that the 'SCP calls for moral decay' to be completely wrong: "We believe in Allah, we pray, fast and follow all the teachings of Islam".³⁹³ Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim's opinion was no different. She emphasized her own religious sincerity: "I pray, fast, give *zakah* (alms), and follow all other rituals. Further, I believe that we, the women of Sudan, are not hampered by Islam, but by exploitation."³⁹⁴ Other women leaders, and even ordinary members of the SCP, believed that Islam did not pose any problem for their liberation. What posed problems was the interpretation of the Islamic teachings by reactionary clergy who wanted to oppress women.

5. 6 The Years of Decline (1971-1989)

After July 1971, when three civilian and perhaps twenty military SCP leaders were executed, many of the party's cadres imprisoned and a witch hunt began against the remaining activists. In consequence the party witnessed a sharp decline in its membership, activities and capacities.

About these days, Mr. Bushra Al-Saim, a former member of Sudan Communist Party, said, "After the failure of the military coup in July 1971, which was led by a member of the Communist Party, Major Hashim Al-Atta, the government of Jaffar Numeiri executed a number of leaders of the Communist Party and arrested thousands of party members and sympathizers." He went on to say, "At that time, the late Communist leader Khider Nasr had just returned from a medical trip abroad. He was in the city of Atbara and rode the first train and arrived to Khartoum on July 22, 1971. When he arrived in Khartoum, he began to arrange for gathering communists not yet been arrested and was able to contact a number of party

³⁹² Interview with Dr Zahir.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Interview with Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim.

leaders and organized the first most important meeting of SCP. The meeting was held in the house of Al-Sir Taha in the Khatmiyya in Khartoum North. Mr. Taha insured, guarded and secured the meeting, which was attended by Al-Tijani Al-Tayeb, Al-Jazuli Saeed, Khider Nasr, Al-Shayqi and Muhammad Ibrahim Nugud, and in this meeting Nugud was elected as secretary general of the party." ³⁹⁵Without such endeavor of Mr. Nasr, the SCP would have expend months to organize a meeting. Such work prerequisite courage, belongingness, and commitment.

The period saw a squeezing out of SCP activities. The SCP's presence was limited to the higher educational institutions, mainly the University of Khartoum and Cairo University in Khartoum. Other institutions began to witness a resurgence SCP after the mid-seventies. This period was characterized by the rebuilding and re-establishing of the old party activities. Due to the secrecy with which the SCP conducted its activities after 1971 and the suspension of the bylaws, there is no statistical information available. The duration of this rebuilding process was long. After the SCP became so very weak, the question of religion was no longer on the table. The opponents of the SCP and also opponents of the regime, such as the Muslim Brothers and the right wing parties, had no interest in the SCP, except at times of students' union elections at the University of Khartoum when a real struggle began. All the efforts of SCP were directed at rebuilding itself and in the struggle against the regime. SCP new cadres began to emerge and the SCP was gradually able to oppose the regime more effectively. However, in 1977 the regime began to adopt Islamic methods of government and established Islamic banks. Sharia law was introduced in 1983. Moreover, this notwithstanding, the regime remained one of the stronger allies of the United States in East Africa, a factor which also encouraged the regime to continue its suppression of SCP activists and to ban the party.

³⁹⁵ Interview with Mr. Bushra Al-Saim, x member of SCP.

In 1985, following widespread popular unrest, Numeiri was deposed by a Transitional Military Council and democracy was reinstated. In the period 1985-1989, the SCP began to flourish again to a limited degree. The struggle waged against the party in this period was characterised by a low level of intensity, as the opponents, especially the Muslim Brothers, had already realised their goals and were strong enough to feel secure and realise that the SCP was no longer a threat to them.

5.7 The Current Situation

Members of the SCP with whom I have conducted interviews assure me that they have never been presented with a critique of religion as such by party leaders, but only a critique of Islamism, that is political Islam. Islamism broke with the fundamental principle of keeping religion and the state separate. A position totally antithetical to the SCP's calls for a democratic civic state, and for religion be treated a personal matter. Also the SCP has always called for a state where citizens have equal rights and freedoms, for an equalitarian economic development for the whole of Sudan and three separate powers, the legislative, the executive and the judiciary.³⁹⁶ In contrast, the National Islamic Front, which led the coup of 1989, imposed on the whole of Sudanese society an interpretation of Islamic law that suited its members' interests. In relation to this the SCP has consistently and fiercely fought those political parties that have adhered to a policy of applying Islamic Sharia law in Sudan. Islamic fundamentalism remains the greatest enemy of SCP. However, the SCP has on occasions during periods of political struggle against the various military regimes, made temporary alliances with Islamic parties. Today, the SCP is allied with all Islamic parties who have come out against the current Islamist regime. The SCP current alliances include the Umma Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, the Popular Conference and the Republican Party. The SCP

³⁹⁶ See, SCP Programme of 2009. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=169166>. Accessed on 17-04-2009.

considered and still considers that applying Marxism does not mean the negation of religion. The central issue for the SCP and its leadership is and was not religion itself but that religion should not be used to hinder progress or justify exploitation of the masses. The SCP's stand is based on respect for the beliefs of the people and their religions: Islam, Christianity and African animism.³⁹⁷ The SCP considers religion as an essential component of the Sudanese people's consciousness, conscience and identity. Thus the SCP rejects any calls that discredit the role of religion in the life of the Sudanese individual and family, their moral values, and aspirations for social justice. Further, the SCP has itself been inspired by some of the values and purposes of religious teachings, using them to support and strengthen the weak and mobilise forces for democracy and social change on the basis of respect and religious tolerance in a multi-religious and faith-based and partly secularised country. However, in the current climate, the SCP appears to want to continue to put religion in its perspective. The SCP does not see all religion as an obstacle to social progress. Thus, as examples quoted earlier in this chapter suggest, in many instance, the leaders of SCP used religion, and Quranic verses in particular to open a public meeting. In a recent interview with the current Secretary General of the Party, the team of journalists who were present at the interview spoke about how they prayed with him and how they spent time in Ramadan interviewing him in accordance with Muslim custom. As was the case with previous leaders and cadres, the Secretary General emphasised that the party has nothing to hide and that members generally respect Islam and religion and they never forbid their members to be believers. Indeed recently the party issued a statement denouncing the 'Insulting of Islam.' Further, a party spokesman said:

We in the Communist Party strongly reject the abuse of the religion of Islam as a sacred belief that deserves appreciation and respect. We reject abuse in any form whatsoever,

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*

in films or in cartoons or in statements. We also reject and condemn particularly the abuse directed against the Prophet Muhammad. It was natural that the response to this reprehensible abuse was an angry reaction, and widespread condemnation from Muslims all over the world, even from non-Muslims who respect holy beliefs.³⁹⁸ The murder of French and other cartoonists perceived as insulting the Prophet, and was seen as an understandable response.

This stance is not new; as I have suggested in this chapter the SCP has always held to this position throughout its existence. The previous Secretary General, Abdelkhalig Mahjoub, wrote in 1954, "Communism in Sudan does not fight against Islam; a free man fights an idea with an idea."³⁹⁹ He went further and said:

Is it correct that communist political thought calls for the abolishing of Islam? No, that is purely an absurd lie. My idea, which I believe in, calls for the unification of all Sudanese whether Muslims or Christians, animist or non-believers against one enemy which is the foreign colonialism and only one goal the Independence of the Sudan and the establishment of a regime that make the Sudanese people happy and able to realise their dreams.⁴⁰⁰

This stance continued to fuel SCP literature after independence and has remained intact right up to the current day. Not only that; some religious clergy who studied, for example, at Alazhar Islamic university in Cairo were also members of the party and had contributed significantly to its literature.⁴⁰¹ Imam Kafori recalled how: "I was the founder of the SCP branch in Egypt when I was studying in Alazhar. Furthermore, I joined the Socialist Teachers

³⁹⁸ SCP Spokesman in *Median* (the newspaper of the SCP) and other media outlets.

³⁹⁹ 'How I Became a Communist' in "Lamahat fi Tariikh Alhizb Alshawi'a (Landmarks in the History of the Communist Party", in Arabic, also published in *Alayam Daily* newspaper, No. 306, 5 October 1954. Translation mine. When the SCP confronted such campaigns in newspapers, other leaders defended the SCP.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Kafori, a graduate of Alazhar, which specialises in Islamic sciences. The interview is by Hasan Warag, a communist journalist in *Madian*.

Association when I returned to Sudan and we worked among the teachers to support our party point of view”.⁴⁰² All these examples indicate that the SCP did not and does not consider religion – or Islam – as a hindrance to its activities. On the contrary the SCP does not look into the background of the members if they adhere to its programme and defend its political and organisational line or standpoint. However, some of the party’s opponents still consider SCP membership as signifying atheism and some of the security forces fight against the SCP and hunt down its members because they are convinced that SCP members are all infidels. A recent story reflects this. It is well known that the current regime has from its ascent to power cracked down on the trade unions and political movements with a special focus on the communists. Siddig Yousif, a communist trade unionist, went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and there he met face to face the security officer who had tortured him in the notorious Ghost Houses. He recalls:

The officer was amazed and looked at me from head to toe. He sat down, held his head and said to me “How can that be?” I said to him, “I am like you, I believe in Allah and do all the rituals you do and now we are face to face for the first time since the last time in your office. We are now in the Kabah. I am here for pilgrimage”. He said to me “I thought that you are an infidel and that none of you do not believe in Allah. But now I understand. Please accept my apologies”.⁴⁰³

In an interview with Yousif Husain, a prominent Central Committee member and spokesman of the SCP, the interviewee confirms that the SCP does not reject the Sudanese Constitution where various paragraphs say that Islam will be one of the sources of legislation. He states that this has been the case since the interim constitution of 1956, which acknowledged from the beginning that Islamic and traditional beliefs are the sources of legislation and the party

⁴⁰² *ibid.*

⁴⁰³ Interview with Siddig Yousif.

did not object to this.⁴⁰⁴ “The 1956 constitution provides in its preamble for Sharia Law as the source of legislation, our party has not rejected this.”⁴⁰⁵

Yet opponents remain unconvinced and the battle over the party and religion continues. In 2009 the SCP was declared anti-Islamic and atheist. This statement came from the Islamic Clergy Authority and an Imam in a suburb of Khartoum called for the destruction of the SCP headquarter in the area. Many people answered this call and participated in the demonstration and tried to destroy the office and burn the place down.⁴⁰⁶ Yet some groups rallied in support of the SCP. Thus, in response to this event and in a press release, an organisation called the ‘Association for the Freedom of Conscience’ called on President Omar Beshir, his Deputy Silva Keer and Ali Osman, to intervene to end ‘the Authority of Sudan Scholars (the clergy), accusing them of mobilising society to violence and counter-violence.’⁴⁰⁷ In addition to this, another association asserted: ‘Stop the *fatwas* that declare citizens to be non-believers’.⁴⁰⁸ Not long after the attack on the headquarters, an organisation, called the ‘Association of Religious Scholars and Preachers in Sudan’, issued a *fatwa* (*takfiri*) saying that the Sudanese Communist Party was atheist.⁴⁰⁹ The Association said in a press statement:

The principles of the Communist Party, say that religion and the idea of God are part of a myth. The SCP doctrine is pure atheism. Moreover its faith in the three leaders (Marx, Lenin and Stalin) and disbelief in God, religion and private ownership show that all communists are infidels, they are outside of realm of Islam.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Yousif Hussein.

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11227&article=533070#.WpSyAnxG3IU>. Also see: <http://www.israj.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-3938.html>. Accessed on 24-08-2009.

⁴⁰⁷ www.sudaneseonline.com This is the website, where copies of the press release were placed.

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ A Fatwa is a religious opinion. Takfiri means declaring as infidel. Fatwas can only be issued by a high religious authority. Until recently Sudan had a tolerant culture and never declared someone an infidel. This trend began at the end of the sixties when the Muslim Brotherhood began to use Islamic slogans in political discourse. Later they utilised Islamic teaching purely to accomplish political ends.

⁴¹⁰ Text of the Fatwa as published in www.sudaneseonline.com

The statement went on to say: “Any communist is a *kafir* (infidel) even though he or she says the prayers and follows other Islamic rituals.”⁴¹¹ The statement included many further points attacking the SCP and called for its disbandment. For its part, the Communist Party rejected these allegations and also rejected any resort to violence.

Today, the SCP is allied

Recent history has made it very clear that the SCP cannot co-exist in a society where there is no rule of law, freedom of association and respect for human rights. At the same time the SCP is clear about its position towards many issues raised in the political and social arena. It remains the case that many members of the general public and intellectuals know that the SCP has very high standards in recruiting its members and still follows the rules laid down by the founding members. These insist that a member must be brave, generous, helpful, respectful of the social and religious customs of his or her own community and Sudanese society in general. However, in some parts of the Sudan there are still people, even families of SCP members, who look at their sons or daughters as infidels once they join the party. Stories are told about released prisoners. For example, one of them went back to his home, about thousand kilometres from prison. When he arrived the family slaughtered a lamb as a feast, but after they had arranged every thing they left him alone and did not eat with him, which is very strange in Sudanese culture. When a friend asked why, they answered because the Sheikh said that eating with him was ‘haram’. This example well illustrates the contradictions experienced by individual families because of the conflict between cultural practices and more radical forms of Islam.

5.8 The Membership

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*

In this study of the SCP and religion, the opinions of the rank and file of the party have not been a major focus. This is mainly due to the fact that the public image of SCP is created and relayed to the public through the leadership and members are expected to follow strict party guidelines and discipline in such matters. While the ordinary members play an important role in representing the policies of the party, they are governed by the Party Constitution. Failure to abide by this might lead to the expulsion of a member, if the SCP fears that s/he might destroy the image of the party as tolerant towards religion. Within the rank and file there are many who within very limited circles declare their belief or non-belief. But also there are leaders who came to the SCP from a philosophical perspective and clearly adhere to a conventional Marxist point of view and reject any sort of religion. Khatim Adlan, one of the prominent leaders of the second generation, clearly adheres to a materialist point of view. Many others like him were and are in agreement with him but remain silent about their position on religion.

Within the SCP, religion and belief have never been openly a subject of discussion nor have they been a priority for the members. The struggle in Sudan was and is still about social justice and freedom. Although, in general Sudanese society can be considered a largely tolerant society, attitudes to dissent within the SCP run contrary to that trend and party discipline is paramount.⁴¹² The constitution of the party maintains that the party will expel any member who does not respect the beliefs of the people. Similarly members cannot openly declare their standpoint on religion, if they are against religion or do not believe in any religion. Despite this, among the communists there are voices that advocate atheism but they only share their views among a very narrow circle of friends.

⁴¹² As discussed earlier, this points to the continuation of pre-1991 Soviet influence on party structures and regulations while aspects of the constitution deviate substantially from the Soviet model.

Throughout its history, from its establishment in 1946 until now, the SCP has complied with the traditions and customs of Sudanese society as a developing country where both religion and customs dictate to people some great part of their attitudes and beliefs. The SCP's justifications of its position, which runs counter to the policies of most communist parties, were and still are straightforward. They need the support of people and they do not want to alienate them. Thus a cadre member who gave lessons to new members in philosophy, economics and socialism, recalls how he had never hesitated to stop teaching when he heard the *Azan* (Athan)'call for prayer' and let those who wanted to pray have the chance to do that.⁴¹³ Furthermore – and also reflective of Sudanese culture up until the mid 1970s – communist student members often asked their brothers and fathers, who might be deeply religious, for financial support and the students would pay their member's fees to the SCP from this allowance. Some of the leaders, like Farouk have attempted to explain this. Thus, in an interview he suggests: "If the SCP is a party for philosophers then it should reject religion. But it is a party with the programme, and so it did not reject Islam."⁴¹⁴

This policy led to a high degree of acceptance of communist activists. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, a former member of the Central Committee, related how: "We, meaning the SCP, have been accepted by the Sudanese people as we are, while the people rejected and fought the Republican Brothers."⁴¹⁵ In public meetings the SCP has continued to be fanatical in defending the beliefs of other people. For all the above reasons and because the first cadres who established the party came from very traditional backgrounds, they were unable to shed its customs, traditions and local beliefs. Popular Islam was so dominant that even those who

⁴¹³ Interview with a cadre who wished to remain anonymous.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Dr Farouk Mohamed Ibrahim.

⁴¹⁵ The Republican Brothers is a reformist Islamic party, founded and led, until his execution in 1985, by Mahmoud Mohamed Taha. This party called for reforming Islamic laws, and an interpretation of Islamic teaching to match the contemporary world situation. It also called for the emancipation of women and fought the use of religion in politics. Interview with Abdullah Ali Ibrahim.

were not believers used the same language as the Imam or religious man or woman. The SCP could not survive without being part of the social fabric and that comes through its acceptance of the society as it is.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis addresses the largely untold history of communism in Sudan. Drawing on the limited available primary documentation, the work of other scholars and substantive oral history interviews, it has presented and analysed the structure and day-to-day functioning of the Communist Party from its foundation until the present. In doing so it aims to make an original contribution both to Sudanese political history and international communist studies. The originality of the thesis for Sudanese political history lies in its use of rich oral history data which throws light on unexplored dimensions of the party including the daily lives and work of cadres working openly and underground. As explained in Chapter 1, the secrecy by which the SCP was and is bound, which was a reaction to early repression by the different regimes, has made writing about the party more difficult for scholars. For reasons also outlined in chapter 1, I was able to make direct contact with party leaders who trusted me and expressed an interest in participating in this research. The contribution of the thesis to international communist studies lies both in the history of the party and in its attempt to look at the detailed functioning of a communist party that developed in the context of ant colonial struggle in a traditional, tribal-based, agrarian Muslim society with very low levels of literacy or education and virtually no industrial working class. My discussion particularly in Chapter 2 of the specific origins and nature of Sudanese communism and how Egypt was a greater influence than Moscow breaks with 'centre-periphery' narratives. The previously unexplored nature of the research in this thesis has meant that it fill a gap in the knowledge about an organisation where control of information has always been very important. While others have written and published research or narratives that tackle the general, external aspects of the SCP, this research has gone more deeply into oral sources in order to tackle its historical

development, organisational structure, underground work and one of the most sensitive subjects in Sudanese politics, namely Islam and the SCP.

It is clear from the data that I have analysed in the course of this thesis that during the Cold War the Sudan Communist Party's policies changed according to broader regional alliances and internal political conditions and coalitions within Sudan. This can be seen in four different periods. In the 1950s, the main concerns were the struggle for independence at a time when regionally there was widespread support for the Nasser regime in Egypt and in its war against the Suez Campaign of 1956. Sudan became independent in 1956 and the new government's policies were based upon anti-colonial struggle, anti-Israeli aggression and a non-alliance stand internationally. However, given that the USSR supported African communist parties and the African national liberation movement, it also attracted the new government into its sphere of influence. Internally the SCP was waging a struggle on both the political and social fronts and it was only in 1956 that it was officially proclaimed as a legal, functioning, political organisation. The second period that followed the 1958 military coup was a time when the regime continued the same earlier line of alliances regionally, but internationally moved towards alliance with the USA. This caused internal upheavals within Sudan led by the SCP and its internal allies in the Trade Union Movement. The period ended with the popular uprising of 1964 and the institution of a parliamentary pluralist regime. This period witnessed the representation of the SCP in the parliament by 13 democratically elected members. It also saw their illegal expulsion from parliament and the period was ended by the coup of the Free Officers in 1969. The Numeiri Regime was in power from 1969 to 1985. At first it adopted leftist policies but after two years the regime became hostile to the SCP, USSR and all Eastern Bloc countries. This period witnessed the Sudan's integration into the international capitalist system. However, the regime continued to maintain strong relations

with China. After the uprising of 1985 nothing changed. The SCP was very weak following the extensive witch-hunting of party members during Numeiri period. Moreover while the trade union movement continued to play a prominent role Sudanese internal politics, it had been incorporated by the government. In 1989 the current Islamic fundamentalist regime came to power after another military coup. Once again the SCP was harassed and its members were persecuted and tortured. The impact of this was very limited at first. The SCP focused on reorganising the opposition through the national alliance that included other political parties and the trade union movement but gradually many cadres went into exile.

As discussed in Chapter 2, my research in the accessible Soviet digital archives, suggests that Sudan did not predominate in the priorities of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s. After the Numeiri coup of 1969, the Soviets began to show some kind of interest. This was due to the fact that the SCP had some officers within the leading Revolutionary Council. This was short lived and after 1971 the relationship was severed. Yet as discussed above, during the whole period of its history up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the SCP benefited from training and financial support from the Eastern Bloc. Many cadres were trained and studied there. Also medical treatment for cadres was offered.⁴¹⁶ The end of the Soviet Bloc thus had a far-reaching impact on SCP. In response the SCP opened an internal dialogue that lasted for 15 years concerning the end of the Soviet Union and discussed the possibility of changing the name of the party.

6.1 Economic and Social Conditions for Party Building

⁴¹⁶ The founding fathers were in a phase of denial as regards the impact, influence and assistance of the USSR. This is mainly the result of Sudanese customs, that sees foreign support as shameful, particularly as it has been done in the shadow. They now and then recognise this but they stress the independence of their party.

As outlined in Chapter 2, it was the economic and social changes initiated by the colonial administration and the hopes for independence encouraged by the Second World War that created a climate in which a growing national and political awareness could flourish. This was of central importance to the development of a political culture in the Sudan, since it aided the recruitment of sections of the population to political causes. This was particularly true in the case of the Sudan Communist Party. Socio-economic changes brought about by the building of infrastructural projects, especially the railways and the Gezira Scheme, described in Chapter 2, served as the backbone for the establishment, spread and activities of the SCP. However despite this, Sudan remained a predominantly agricultural country in which the majority of the largely illiterate population both believe in and live according to Islam. These factors forced the SCP to diversify its strategies. These strategies, described in Chapter 2, show how a communist party might make headway in a country in which social and economic relations are far removed from those in Europe. Thirty years into its existence, and after being fully allied to Leninism and rejecting liberal parliamentary democracy, the SCP arrived in 1977 at a point at which it changed direction and embraced the parliamentary road to political power. The SCP had a short-lived and bitter experience of the democratic regime in the 1960s when its members were illegally expelled from the parliament. After 1977 the SCP was unable to provide an intellectual justification for the change from democratic centralism, in which the CP is the leading force representing the masses, changes course and supports liberal parliamentary democracy. In such a situation the SCP has to compete with other political parties including those representing the bourgeoisie. This was not the only area in which the party actually did break with classical Marxism-Leninism. As detailed in Chapter 5, another crucial one was its policies on religion and secularism. As I hope chapter 5 demonstrated, the SCP's policy towards Islam was consistently one of not criticising religious beliefs and practices. While this policy was clearly a political necessity in Sudan it was far from just this.

As many of my interviewees testify in chapter 5, many SCP members were and are practising Muslims who see no contradiction between the objectives of Islam and those of communism. This raises the interesting question of whether communism in Sudan produced the beginnings of a genuine, positive synthesis of Islam and Marxism equivalent to liberation theology in Christianity. While this can be argued, it is clearly the case that the rise of Islamist governments in the 1980s largely put a stop to such developments in large part by introducing Sharia law and changing the face of Islam itself in Sudan.

6. 2 Legacies of Marxism-Leninism

Some researchers attribute the weakness of the SCP to its persistent adherence to democratic centralism, following classical Marxism-Leninism and applying Stalinist techniques in suppressing internal intellectual difference.⁴¹⁷ Even today, the SCP continues to suppress intellectual debate within its rank and file. For example, in 2015 twenty-three physicians were expelled from the party because they had expressed their concern over the way the party administered. It is clear that if the party's fortunes are to rise again, the leaders will need to be more open to new ideas, theories and to applying democracy within its rank and file. Its ambivalence about taking this path can also be seen in the 2016 Civil Disobedience Revolt, when intellectuals, the youth, students and workers attempted to organise independently, yet the SCP's position remained unclear. Many commentators consider the SCP no longer to be a mobilising and recruiting organisation. However, in January 2018 the party was able to promote popular protests against the fundamentalist regime and to enter into a successful coalition with many social and political actors. These included different parties some of which have a religious base: the Umma, Unionist, Ba'ath and Sudanese Conference political parties, the Republican Brothers, the students, and many unaffiliated members of the general

⁴¹⁷ Elzailae, 2017, pp. 18-22.

public.⁴¹⁸

Sudan was and is a country with a strong indigenous culture securely grounded in Islam. The Sudan Communist Party, founded in 1946, emerged in a cultural landscape dominated by literary clubs established by the recently educated elites, alongside traditional leaders and traditional culture. The customs and traditions of Sudanese society shaped both social and political interactions between the different individuals and groups. In this period most of the Sudanese population were living in rural areas. The dominance of traditional culture and customs meant that despite colonial rule, the Sudan continued to display social values and practices that were indigenous in spirit and form. The new elites who had been in the colonial schools could not displace or transcend traditional social norms and practices. As described in Chapter 2, it was a time when secular education was largely unknown and schooling was scarce. When the colonial power established a handful of schools, they had a significant impact on people's lives. Although a majority of citizens resisted this educational system, considering it as part of the general plan of the colonial power to control them, a minority group joined these schools. The trend to resist general educational institutions was assisted by the fact that 90% of the population was living in the countryside. This trend towards resistance was strengthened by traditional power structures according to which Sudan was still under the authority of the tribes, which were based upon the extended family. While the Sudanese elites were graduates of the modern educational system, religion and tribe remained

⁴¹⁸ The Sudanese Conference is an independent political party established on 1 January 1986 by former Chief Justice Abdul Majid Imam. After his death, Ibrahim El-Shiekh became its president. The party is considered one of Parties struggle against the current regime. See: <http://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/movementsandparties/2014/2/12>, accessed on 30 May 2018.

the pillars of society, culture and politics, and therefore affected the elites' approach to political and social problems.

The SCP has had a very chequered history and has spent the majority of its existence as an underground organisation. The fortunes of the party were and are connected both to the growth of the economy and the nature of the regime in power, but the international political situation, in particular the Cold War was also very important for the history of the party. As previous chapters have shown, in the early years, the SCP was successful in creating a number of very effective organisations such as the Sudan Workers' Trade Union Federation, the Sudanese Women's Union, and the Sudan Youth Union and in building strong bases in different parts of the Sudan. However, after the July 1971 massacre, anti-activism and hostility to trade unions contributed to the creation of incorporation policies. These policies which began in the 1970s and fully succeeded in the 1990s, dismantled independent unions and made them part of the National Islamic Front, an Islamist political organisation founded in 1976.⁴¹⁹

During the years when economic decline occurred, the SCP lost large numbers of its members and support. For example, when factories that had been established to prepare cotton for export were sold and part of the work force fired, the SCP lost a base from which to recruit membership in areas where its members could easily advocate the party programme and standpoints. In Khartoum, where the industrial sector was concentrated, the government embarked on anti-industrial policies such as higher taxes, electric current cuts, higher import tariffs and the dismissal of politically active workers. Declining membership and loss of a

⁴¹⁹ The National Islamic Front was led by Dr. Hasan al-Turabi and was involved in the government from 1979 onwards. From 1989 to the late 1990s it played a dominant role in the government.

support base has also been felt in the agricultural sector where the stabilisation policies after the 1970s' economic crisis had major effects on agriculture. The Gezira Scheme, which was one of the largest sectors and specialised in cotton production, was completely destroyed and the farmers drifted to the cities to work in the informal economy. Historically HASITO and later the SCP directed efforts to organise the farmers and other groups which were ignored by other political parties. At this time, the SCP's success was due both to the prevailing general conditions and to the subjective factors facing different groups such as farmers, students, youth, women, and workers. However since the 1970s, the conditions that promoted recruitment have been transformed by successive national governments, most recently the current Islamist one, which has pursued incessant anti-'lower class' economic policies. Moreover for more than a decade after the 1989 coup, SCP members and leaders were imprisoned, tortured, fired from jobs and murdered. Most of the middle cadres were able to flee the country in the face of torture, prosecution and imprisonment by the regime.

With the current development in communications and the computer revolution, the remaining founding cadres have confronted many difficulties in establishing contact and communication with the public, in particular with the youth and women. This is mainly due to the absence of skilled middle-class cadres many of whom had fled the country. After 2005, the year that marked the signing of the peace accord between the Sudan government and Sudan People's Liberation Movement⁴²⁰, the SCP enjoyed some limited freedom, though more recently Fatwa's (religious judgments) were issued in 2000 and 2009 against the SCP and against recruiting members. Prior to this the party was, however, able to convene its two congresses and

⁴²⁰ Founded in 1983 as the political wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement is a political party in South Sudan. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 9 January 2005 ended the civil war.

announce some changes to its bylaws, but these congresses also re-emphasised the party's adherence to Marxism-Leninism.

The SCP earlier effectiveness had only been possible due to the umbrella organisations that the party established. These organisations were led by communist cadres, but were independent. However, this platform now is non-existent. During the seventy years of its existence, we can safely say that SCP has been able to form different strategic political coalitions. During the colonial period and then after independence, the SCP formed many coalitions either during elections or to restore democratic rule in the face of military regimes. These coalitions were and are situational, in the sense that they were/are completely dictated by the political situation and the balance of power. The SCP coalitions are an example of the flexibility of the leadership and its understanding of the local conditions. The SCP now urgently needs this flexibility to create new forms of organisation to replace the old. As argued throughout this thesis, the SCP was established in a traditional society, where education was a privilege denied to most of the population. In a society where both religion and customs dictate to people a great part of their attitudes and beliefs, the SCP complied with these traditions and customs. It was a stand that has prevailed since its establishment in 1946. The SCP's official justifications for this stance in the face of orthodox Marxism-Leninism were and still are straightforward. They need the people and they do not want to alienate them, but as specified above, important too was the fact that many party members also believed in Islam. From the beginning the SCP could not survive without being part of the social fabric, as is shown in the everyday life of cadres, analysed in detail in chapters 3 and 4. This may explain why the SCP was and is still very uncritical of local customs and respects the religions and beliefs of the Sudanese people. This was clearly the case even when Islam and religious teachings were not part of political discourse, as is the case now under the

current Islamist regime. Now that the SCP's religious opponents have power, represented by a repressive state apparatus, they still resort to campaigning against the SCP. The general political environment, is shaped by conflicts in different parts of the country, and has given opponents of the SCP much support in their fight against SCP.

The SCP is the only party in Sudan that has shown consistent concern for different sub-cultures. The SCP has remained a mobilising and recruiting organisation and culture is one domain where the party can still find members. In a dictatorship, intellectuals often seek freedom and Marxism still has the power to open their eyes to a new world vision. Members in the cultural domain were and are recruited to help the SCP reach the population at large and to foster its political position in society. The SCP has often depended on the contribution of members in the area of culture but it has not had a complete vision for this field. This may be due to the long period of working underground and lack of core specialized groups in the cultural field. Moreover, those intellectuals who left the SCP were considered in many instances as enemies and treated badly by the members of the SCP.

6. 3 The Future of the Party

The development and history of the SCP shows how Sudanese communists were able to adapt Marxism creatively to local conditions. This localisation was and is the main factor leading to the acceptance of the party in Sudanese society and the party's stand on religion is a good example of localising Marxism. Similarly, the party's adoption in 1977 of a parliamentary route to power was motivated both by a strategic understanding of local conditions and the specific development of Sudan society. Yet this attention to the specificity of the local was accompanied by a resistance to ideas of implementing internal democracy within the party. One of the SCP shortcomings, according to many researchers, has been the failure to apply

full democracy inside the party, i.e., applying the right to free expression of ideas. Leninist democratic centralism led many intellectuals and educated members to leave the party.

Intellectuals and other educated and committed members needed the space to express their ideas and thoughts about the party programmes, tactics, policies and how to approach the majority of the Sudanese population. They also needed to have their ideas considered seriously.

Without recruiting new blood to its rank and file, the SCP will not, in the foreseeable future, have a serious contribution to make to political life in Sudan. The SCP needs to recruit new members, in particular young people, and to pay attention to groups and regions ignored by other political parties. However, to recruit such new blood the party will have to reconsider its ideological base, be more open to new intellectual theories and ideas and dedicate time and effort to studying the social, ethnic and economic conditions in a country where in the digital age everything is changing rapidly. Furthermore, the current economic situation in Sudan is deteriorating rapidly and the poverty rate has increased steadily. Many young people perceive the solution to be leaving the country and emigrating to other countries or working in marginal but lucrative informal sectors. Such survival strategies on the part of young people, both male and female, mean a narrowing the chances for the SCP to recruit new members to its rank and file. In this era the SCP needs to develop, train and educate a cadre who can manage and work with the new technologies that facilitate communication, publishing, archiving etc. Making use of such technology will solve a lot of issues related to underground cadres and help them be more creative. Also it will help the party to reach remote areas through mobile connections. Reaching out to women and girls over issues like FGM is important, and recruiting men and women with leadership abilities.

Another element that should be considered within the SCP programme and actions is the ethnicity question. Sudan is a multi-ethnic country, a fact that has not been seriously taken into consideration in the programme of the party. As the recent wars in Darfur and South Sudan have demonstrated, today ethnicity forms a serious issue in the Sudanese political system. To foster and enhance democracy, the SCP should take steps to agree with other political actors on signing a democratic charter to always preserve democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

The SCP's past success was due to the prevailing general economic and social conditions and to subjective cultural and sub-cultural factors facing different groups such as students, youth, women, workers and farmers. The SCP has to consider these in its programme and negotiate alliances with other parties in the struggle for democratic trade union laws. Free trade unions and other organisations such as the Sudanese Women's Union and Sudan Youth Union would help re-establish the sort of wide umbrella that previously enabled the SCP to flourish. The SCP also needs to re-establish close solidarity with other African and Arabic communist movement. This would help the party to exchange experience and ideas and foster the independence of each party.

The flight of intellectuals and other educated members, whether caused by persecution by the regime or the limitations of democratic centralism suggests that the future development of the SCP can be achieved only by developing new methods to reach the broader population. In recent decades the Sudanese population has grown rapidly as has did the labour force. Many new entrants to the labour market have joined the informal sector in urban areas. This has impacted both the trade union movement and the SCP. Both depend upon workers in enterprises to be organised. Informal labour power tends not to be organised and to have a

high rate of mobility. This factor and others are also likely seriously to affect the growth and development of the SCP. Unless the SCP can change to accommodate such a work force, it will potentially lose a lot of young people. Furthermore, the current economic situation in Sudan is deteriorating rapidly and poverty has increased steadily. Two possible outcomes of this are that the SCP may be able to recruit a lot of angry and aware young people to its ranks or many younger people will leave Sudan, particularly the young urban population.

In seventy years, conditions defeated the SCP to become a powerful political force, as it raised the slogan (Make the party a great social force). Although the party recorded a great rise in the period of independence of Sudan and after the October 1964 revolution until the beginning of the seventies, the party dwindled after that.

Also the Communist Party was not able to build solid alliances with the political organizations and other social movements, that revolved and gathered around it at the beginning, but it gradually moved away. The reason for this, the party wanted to control these organizations instead of allying with them.

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Appendix 1

Notes on People

Abdalla Obaid was born in Al-Masalma, Omdurman in 1929. He attended the intermediate school in Omdurman but was expelled as a result of his political activity participating in demonstrations against British colonialism. He sat for Cambridge Certificate exams. He joined the Communist Party at the end of the 1940s. He was employed in the Department of Agriculture, then he became a full-time politician in charge of the Communist Party in Atbara. He moved to Khartoum and became the **Political Supervisor** for Omdurman. He was a member of the Central Committee supporting committees lower down in the hierarchy and a Communist Party candidate in the 1965 elections. He worked as a journalist but split from the Communist Party in 1970.

Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim Prof . was born in Jilas, Northern Sudan. He graduated from the University of Khartoum and obtained his Master's and Doctoral degrees from the University of **Bloomington, USA**. He worked as a full-time member in the Sudanese Communist Party from 1970-1978. He resigned from the Communist Party in 1978. He was one of those involved in party tutoring (on the Central Education Bureau) in the Communist Party. He wrote the series "Katib Al Shoonaa" and was the editor-in- chief of the *Journal of Sudanese Studies*, produced by the University of Khartoum from 1981 to 1987. He lectured at the Institute of African and Asian Studies and directed the Division of Folklore. He supervised a number of Master and Doctorate theses and wrote more than 15 books in politics and history, a number of plays and a number of published stories. He is now a Professor of History at the University of Missouri and is still writing for several Sudanese newspapers.

Abdul-latif Kamarat (Abdul-latif Mohammed Bashir Kamarat) was born in Dongola, Northern Sudan in 1930. He was one of the founders of the Sudanese Communist Party. He graduated from Jabait Vocational Industrial School as a technician and moved to Egypt for

work. He joined the Egyptian Communist Party – Sudan Department, before the split of the Sudanese Communist Party from the Egyptian Party. To evade the Egyptian security police, this cell in Egypt was composed of dark skinned members, including Egyptian Nubians, Libyans, and Mauritians. In their understanding of applying socialism, they used to steal from the rich and distribute the stolen goods to the poor. He was one of the founders of the Communist Party and of the Sudan Workers Trade Union. He was the first representative of the Sudan Workers Trade Union at the World Federation of Trade Unions in Vienna in 1953. He worked full-time in politics but resigned from the Communist Party after 1970. He was imprisoned for extended periods during the Numeiri regime. He was sacked from his job at the Rabak Cement Factory after the 1989 coup, and arrested subsequently. He moved and lived in Cardiff until his death in 2012.

Ahmed Suleiman, an ex-communist leader, was one of the group who established the SCP and later a Muslim Brothers' Leader. He left the SCP in 1970 after an ideological struggle within the Party and joined the Numeiri Regime as minister and theorist. He was three times as Minister: first after 1964 Revolution, after the Coup of 1969 twice. Ahmed Suleiman is considered a communist writer, lawyer and theorist. He later joined the Muslim Brothers and also became a leader of the organisation.

Al-Amin Mohamed al-Amin was one of the prominent Gezira Farmers leaders and member of SCP Central Committee until 1970 when he opted to quit the party. During his career as trade unionist and as communist he was elected to parliament after the overthrow of the Abood Regime in 1964 and elected minister in the transitional period until 1965.

Al-Gizoli Sa'id was one of the founders of the Sudanese Labours trade Union, also he is one of SCP Founders in 1946, a prominent leader, and a SCP Central Committee member.

Al-Hajj Abdurahman was founder of SCP and trade union movement in Sudan. He left SCP in 1970.

Al-Fatih Al-Rashied was born in 1943 in Kosti. He attended a primary school in Kosti and joined the Communist Party in 1960. He was one of the supervisors of manual printing of the underground Al-Midan newspaper. He was imprisoned for several years during Numeiri's rule.

Ali Ahmed Salih was famous for his ability to organize and mobilize masses. He was an early pioneer of communism in Sudan during the 1920s.

Ali Karti was Foreign Minister from 2006-2012. He is a Muslim Brotherhood member and activist.

Al-Khatim Adlan (Al-Khatim Al-Hadi Ahmed Rajab) was born on 1 January 1946 in Um Dakkat AjJa'aliyyeen village in Gezira. He joined the Communist Party in 1964 during his time at the Madani High School. He studied philosophy at the University of Khartoum, spending 8 years between arrest and political work. He was Social Affairs Secretary in the Executive Committee of the University of Khartoum Students Union in 1968-1969 and graduated with an honours degree but was barred by the State Security Police from being employed by the University. During Numeiri's rule he was imprisoned from May 1969 to April 1985. From 1986 to June 1989 he was editor-in-chief of *Al-Shabiba* newspaper and one of the Party's major public speakers. He was in charge of the Writers and Artists Bureau. He chaired the preparatory committee for the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Communist Party, in 1986. He wrote for Al Midan, the Communist Party Newspaper and went underground to lead opposition work after the coup of 30 June 1989. He was upgraded to membership of the Secretariat of the Central Committee and wrote three papers of which "It is High Time for Change" was the most important. In it he argued for the dissolution of the Communist Party and the change of its name. He resigned from the Communist Party in 1994. In 1995 with others They created the HAQ Movement. In 1995 and was elected as the

Chairperson. He also wrote for various Arabic and English newspapers. He died in April 2005.

Al-Sir Ibrahim al-Natiq worked at the Communication Centre (Dar AlHatif) in Khartoum. He was arrested several times during the rule of Jaffar Numeiri. He was a full-time politician from 1985 to 30 June 1989. He was a musical composer and a vocalist.

Anwar Zahir, was a prominent underground cadre, member on the Central Committee. His role was unknown until disclosed in his obituary.

Brigadier Babikr al-nour was a leading communist officer. When the coup of July 1971, he was together with Farouk Hamada Allah, also in the Free Officers Organization in London. Their airplane was hijacked by the Gaddafi regime and they were arrested and delivered to the Numeiri Regime which returned to power three days after the coup and were immediately executed.

El-Fatih Hajj El-Tom belonged to the Sudan Ba'ath Party, which is an offshoot of the Arab Ba'ath Party, and headed by the Iraqi Ba'ath. He died recently due to cancer.

Farouk Mohammed Ibrahim was a professor and prominent communist leader. He was born in 1932 in Omdurman. He joined the Communist Party in 1948 at Wadi Sayyidna School. He acquired his Master's and Ph.D. degrees in Britain. He was recruited to the SCP party in the late 1940s and led student activities. He was elected as member of the Central Committee until 1970 when he left the Party and remained outside but continued in dialogue with the Party leadership. He worked as a professor at Khartoum University and as a UN expert in Yemen. He returned to teach at the University of Khartoum until 1990, when he was arrested, dismissed and tortured by his former student and colleague Nafie Ali Nafie, a former professor at Khartoum University and head of the security apparatus at the time. He considered the Communist Party as a political programme and not a

‘philosophers’ club’, and that was why he thought a Muslim could join the Sudanese Communist Party. He tells of how his father expelled him from his family home when he knew that he had joined the Sudanese Communist Party, but allowed him to return when he was sure that he was still a Muslim. He is still active in human rights and political radical work and is an oppositionist to the current regime.

Hasan Salamah was born: in Al masalma, Omdurman. He was one of the founders of the Sudanese Communist Party. He joined the Communist Party from Ansar Alsunna Islamic Salafi group after been convinced by reading Marxist books. He was one of the founders of the Communist Party among the farmers in the Gezira and was involved in the Managil Scheme and the Farmers' Unions in the Nuba Mountains. He was a member of the Central Committee.

Hashim al-Atta was the actual leader of the July 1971 coup. He was also executed. Abu Shiba was the Republican Guard leader and underground communist cadre. He was famous for providing a secret hiding place to the Secretary General Abdel khalig Mahjoub during the period of the dispute between the SCP and the Numeiri Regime. He was also executed with many others by shooting as a military man.

Henri Curiel is considered the godfather of the communist movements in Egypt and Sudan. He has established the Democratic Movement for National Liberation, later the Egyptian Communist Party. He was expelled from Egypt in 1950 and lived in Paris until his assassination in 1978. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Curiel

Ibrahim Rodwan, was the Minister of Trade from 1986-1988. He was a leading member in the right wing Unionist Party in Sudan and a Gezira Scheme agricultural engineer.

Judge Al-Rashied Nile was well known and a respected judge. He wrote about the Muslim Brotherhood and criticized the movement for utilizing Islam teachings for own secular ends. His warnings about the ways the Muslim Brotherhood would make gains in politics came true. He denounced them: “The Muslim Brothers are the enemies of Allah and his prophets.”

Judge Hasan al-Boudani is well known as the ‘Red Judge’. He was one of a group of prominent intellectuals and he led them for a long time in the form of the Peace and Human Rights Movement during 1948/1980’s.

Kazem Habib, an Iraqi, was born on 16 April 1935 in the city of Karbala. He graduated from the Faculty of Economics in Berlin University in 1968. He joined the Iraqi Communist Party in 1952. He was arrested and deported from Iraq from 1955-1958 during the period of Nuri al-Said. He worked as a lecturer at Mustansiriya University in 1969 and was retired for political reasons. He was a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party from 1985-1989 and a member of the Editorial Board of *The Voice of People* newspaper and the *New Culture Magazine* of the Iraqi Communist Party. He is a member of the German Institute of Scientific Research. He has been living in Germany since 1982.

Khalidah Zahir Sarour Al-Sadati was born on 18 January 1926. She was one of the two first Sudanese women to enter the University of Khartoum, School of Medicine and to graduate as a doctor in 1952. She was an active political figure both underground and in public and was one of the leaders of the 1946 student demonstrations. She established, with Fatima Talib Ismail, the first women’s organisation, called the Association of Girls, in Sudan in 1946. She was one of the founders of the Sudanese Women's Union and chaired the organisation. She was the first Sudanese woman member of the Sudanese Communist Party

and was a member of the Central Committee. She was a founding member of the Professionals Unions Front in 1964. She took care of underprivileged women free of charge in her private clinic in Dakatra (Doctors) Street in Omdurman. She chaired the Medical Pilgrimage Mission in 1981. She made the pilgrimage of Hajj twice at her own expense. She died in 2015.

Mohamed Ibrahim Nugud was born in Algiteine, White Nile State in 1930. He was General Secretary of SCP from 1971 to 2012. He attended Hantoub secondary school in the late 1940s. His activism against British Colonialism led to his ejection from the University Of Khartoum and he completed his degree in Bulgaria where he studied Communist Economic Philosophy. He returned to Sudan in 1958 and joined the rank of the party. He was imprisoned in Malakal. In 1965 he was elected as in a Member of Parliament representing the Graduate Constituencies. After Abdelkhalig Mahjoub and other leaders were executed by Numeiri in 1971, Nugud went into hiding until 6 April 1985. On 30 June 1989 he was imprisoned for about one year and then he was placed under house arrest until he went into hiding from 1994 to March 2005. His hiding place was uncovered by Salah Ghoush, the Director of the National Intelligence. Nugud wrote “A Dialogue on the Civil State”, “Slavery in Sudanese Society”, “A Note On Land Ownership Records”, “A Dialogue on Materialistic Struggle in Arabic Islamic Philosophy” and “Issues Regarding Democracy in Sudan”.

Al-Mahdi Family is descendent from the **Mahdi** who led the Revolution of 1885 and expelled the Turkish-Egyptian occupiers and established the Al-Mahdist State within the borders of the current Sudan 1885-1898, after which it was conquered by the British Army.

Mahjoub Mohammed Salih was born in 1928 in Hillat Hamad, Khartoum North. He joined Gordon College (currently the University of Khartoum) in 1942. He was expelled for political

reasons and joined the Sudanese National Liberation Movement (later the Sudanese Communist Party) in 1947. He founded al'ayam newspaper together with his friends Mahjoub Osman and Bashir Mohammed Saied in 1953 and has remained its editor-in-chief until today. He was the first Sudanese to distribute a political pamphlet together with his colleague, the late Professor Mohammed Omar Beshir, in 1947. The occurrence took place inside Khartoum North Cinema. He describes how they use to adjourn meetings during Prayer times and that their interest in Marxism was as a theory that fights colonialism. He claimed that most of the Sudanese communists who studied in Egypt were atheists. He resigned from the Communist Party in 1958. He entered parliament as an independent candidate supported by the Sudanese Communist Party in 1965. The interview took place in his office at the al'ayam Newspaper in Khartoum in January 2011.

Mahmoud Mohammad Taha was an old graduate of Gordon Memorial College and mechanical engineer. He established his Party in 1945 and called then for a Republican State. His religious thought took a turn when he was imprisoned by the colonial administration for leading a revolt in his home town, Rufa'a. After his release he began his long struggle to reform Islam thinking, interpretation of Islam. His followers are intellectuals. He was executed for apostasy in January 1985, after a mockery trial by the Numeiri regime in coalition with the Muslim Brothers. After his death, his followers fled the country, most of them in USA, and the remaining members have no real activities.

Mohamed Abdulkareem teaches mandatory courses on Islamic Culture to Khartoum University students. He is the Imam of Jiraif Gharb Mosque. An extremist Jihadist Salafist who considers Bin Laden a martyr, he is thought to be behind the burning down of the Anglican Church in the neighbourhood in April 2012, as well as the attack against the Communist Party offices in August 2009, when mobs emerged from his mosque after he fired them up with his hate speech in April 2012.

Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman was born in Khartoum and attended high school. He joined the Sudanese National Liberation Movement (HASITO later the Communist Party) at 15 years of age. He was elected President of the Students Union of Al-Ahfad Secondary School and served as Secretary of the Sudanese Youth Union. He worked underground from 1950 – 1970. He was in charge of Control and Security in the Communist Party but resigned from the Communist Party in 1969 as a result of his objection of the marriage of Abdel khalig Mahjoub (the Secretary General of the Communist Party) to Mrs. Niemat Malik. A large numbers of Communists objected to this marriage, which generated internal problems within the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee until his resignation. Sulieman had managed many businesses, such as pharmacies, cooperatives etc in Greater Khartoum,

Nafisa Mohammed al-Amin was born in Omdurman. She studied at the Teachers' College in Omdurman and contributed to the education and awareness of women. She was awarded the Cambridge Certificate for English Language Teaching and she worked for BBC Radio. She contributed to the establishment of the Sudanese Women's Union. She wrote articles under the pseudonym "Bint al-Nour". Nafisa broadcast the programme of the Women's Union on Omdurman Radio in 1952. She was appointed as a Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports on 14 October 1971. She was the first woman in the Political Bureau of the Socialist Union, the "Political Organisation of the Government of Jaffar Numeiri". She published a book entitled "Features of the Women's Movement over Half a century 1947 to 1997". She was Teaching Assistant at Ahfad University for women.

Omar Mustafa Al-Mekki: was member of Central Committee, and Chief Editor of Al-Midan, the daily newspaper of SCP. He left the SCP after the 1970 great split. He worked as Director in an insurance company. He died in 2001.

Rifaat al-Said was a prominent Egyptian Communist. He studied in the German Democratic Republic and was awarded a PhD for his thesis on the history of Egyptian communism. A former parliamentarian, he became head of the Tagammu party after the death of Khaled Mohieldin. He wrote more than 10 books. He died on 17 August 2017.

Shakir Mursal was born in Kosti and was one of the founders of the Communist Party. He was expelled from University in Egypt, arrested and deported to Sudan because of his political activities. He resigned from the communist party in the mid- 1950s and became a well known poet. He died in about 2016 in Medani, mid Sudan.

Shafie Khider was born in August 1952 in Khartoum. He joined the Communist Party in 1976. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Khartoum 1977 and worked in the medical field from 1977 until 1980. He resigned in 1978 to work as a full-time politician and became the Political Supervisor leading the Democratic Front of Sudanese Students in Universities and High Institutes. He was arrested late 1980 until the day of the Intifada, April 6, 1985. He worked in the teams assisting the Central Committee, the Secretariat of the Political Liaison Committee and the Communist Party in Khartoum. He was Secretary of the Communist Party in Gezira, Al-Managil and Al-Fao from 1988 until the coup of June 30th 1989. He went under the ground immediately from the first day of the coup. He developed an unknown disease in Sudan, forcing the Party to send him to Egypt. He arrived in Aswan on 31st December 1993 for medical treatment. He represented the party in the National Democratic Alliance abroad and chaired the Foreign Office of the Sudanese Communist Party. He was a former member of the Central Committee.

Sheikh Al-Khier was a prominent Farmers Leader, a Communist and Faki: meaning that he practices traditional medicine using Quran teachings. Also he taught people in the village

where he lived Quran and Hadeeth (sayings of the prophet). He was also the problem-solver for the villagers and the neighbouring villages by helping them to organise themselves in committees , encourage people to ask for their basic right such as schools , health centres and even jobs . Further, he was the marriage registrar and blessing-giver.

(Sheikh) Alamin Mohammed Alamin was the Secretary General of Gezira Scheme Farmers Union, member of the SCP Central Committee till 1970 when he left the party in the great split

Siddig Yousif was born in Omdurman. His father was a prominent cleric and had a mosque. He joined the Sudanese Communist Party in 1949 and is considered as one of its founders. He graduated from the Polytechnical Institute, Department of Engineering, and pursued postgraduate studies in Britain. He was in charge of the Party's 2010 Elections office. He was arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment under General Abboud's rule (1958-1964). He was arrested again during Numeiri's rule (1969-1985), and again in Inqaz period (1989-now). While performing Hajj after his release, he met the officer who tortured him in prison. The officer told him, "I thought you were cheating when you led people in prayers". He is a Member of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau and is now the oldest communist member.

Suad Ibrahim Ahmed was born on 30 May 1935. She went to school in Khartoum and attended the University of Khartoum. She was the first woman to hold a position in the Executive Committee of the University of Khartoum Students Union and was elected as Vice-President in 1975. She joined the Communist Party in March 1952 after reading Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. She was one of the founders of the Sudanese Women's Union and a women's rights advocate. She was dismissed from her job in 1960 when she was an activist against the deportation of inhabitants of Halfa as a result of

floods of High Dam destroyed their homes. She contributed to the dissolution of the Communist Women's League, as she believed that there is no difference between men and women. This action caused her complications with communist women. She was elected to the Central Committee in October 1967, but she with other three women were only invited to attend the Central Committee meetings until January 1968. She said that AlShafie Ahmed AlSheikh told them that the meeting places didn't have comfortable toilets for women. She reported her loud objection. She called for the registration of children by their mother's name as mothers get pregnant, bring up and educate their children. She was one of the founders of the [Institute of extramural Studies](#), which provided opportunities for those who missed regular university education. She was a Communist Party candidate in April 1986 elections and remained a member of the Central Committee until her death. She died on 1st January 2013.

Suleiman Hamid Alhajj Mohammed Alhajj was born in Omdurman. He joined WHO after graduation from Secondary School. His salary was 30 pounds, half of which he gave to his parents every month. Then he acceded to the request of the Communist Party to be a full-time member. The monthly transmittance to his parents decreased to 50 piasters or one pound when available. He will all a regular columnist for Al-Midan, the newspaper of the Sudanese Communist Party. He was detained several times and went into hiding from June 1989 until 2005. He is a former member of the Central Committee and Central Secretariat of the Sudanese Communist Party. He was one of the full-time members who worked in the Gezira and Managil Scheme to persuade farmers to join the Party. He wrote 3 books on the Gezira and Managil Scheme, and another book about [Darfur](#). .

The Khatmiya is a Sufi order headed by a religious a man who has had followers in the Eastern and Northern part of the country. [Originally they came from the Higaz \(as they said \)](#) , Saudi Arabia, but had a strong relationship with Egypt. They establish their order and practice teaching of Quran.

Tigani Eltayeb Babiker was born in Omdurman around 1926 and was one of the founders of the Sudanese Communist Party. He remained a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to his death. He studied for two years at the Faculty of Medicine from 1946 at Gordon College (now the University of Khartoum). He was expelled for political reasons. He went to study engineering in Cairo and joined the Egyptian Communist Movement but did not complete his degree because he was imprisoned from May 1948 to April 1949, and expelled for political reasons. He returned to Sudan where with a group of companions, he formed the Sudanese National Liberation Movement (HSTO). His father was one of the leaders in the struggle against British colonialism and regularly bought Egyptian books and magazines which helped Tigani to raise his awareness. He was in charge of *Al Midan* newspaper until his death. My interview with him was held with him in his house in Omdurman in November 2011. He died on 23rd November 2011.

Ali Abdallah Yaqoub: one of the Muslim Brothers and inciter of the masses to attack the SCP homes and chase its members. He was not a participant in the debate or seminar, but he came by chance to collect his wife Hikmat Sid Ahmed, Muslim sister, participant in the seminar, who attempted hard to provoke the audience by accusing the Communists as dissolved, want to spread vice among Sudanese and transfer Sudanese women to prostitution. After the attack of the young student to Muslim Brother's ideas, they were astonished and puzzled. Yaqoub came and they told him about what the young student said, he replied: "This is our chance to get rid of the Communists."

Yousif Ahmed al-Mustafa was a peasant and member of SCP central committee, he left the SCP in 1970 after the great split.

Yousif Husein Mohammed Al-Amin was born in 1938 in Khartoum. He chaired The Khartoum University Students' Union (KUSU) and spent one year in prison. He graduated in 1963-1964 and after one month in the Department of Geology, he became a full-time political

activist. He was imprisoned for about 7 years during Numeiri's rule. After that he worked underground for a long time. He was arrested several times after the June 1989 Coup. He was a spokesperson of the Communist Party and a Member of the Central Committee and the Secretariat of the Central Committee.

Appendix 2

Notes on Places

Almogran Park is well known park in Omdurman city where people usually come together in the evening. This park was closed in 1983 after the introduction of Sharia Laws that prohibits drinking.

Alsahafa is a residential area of Khartoum.

Bahri or Khartoum Bahri is part of the Capital of Sudan. The capital consists of three towns separated by the Nile and its tributaries: the White Nile & the Blue Nile. For that reason, it is called the Triangular Capital.

Burri is a residential area in Khartoum, near the Blue Nile and behind the Airport.

Kosti is a town in the middle of the Sudan on the White Nile and the port for ships sailing to the South of Sudan. It has a big railway station that connects West Sudan with the rest of the country. It is also an industrial city.

Triangular Capital: The capital of Sudan consists of three towns separated by the Nile and its tributaries: the White Nile & the Blue Nile. For that reason, it is called the Triangular Capital. It consists of: Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum Bahri City.

Wad Medani is the capital city of Gezira State and the second biggest city after the capital. It lies by the Blue Nile at a distance of 180 kilometres from Khartoum.

Wad Saydina was the second higher secondary school in the Sudan. The school was famous for its high performance, students' activism and high national awareness.

Appendix 3

Notes on Organisations, Publications and Cultural Practices

About Military Regime This regime came to power after the coup of 1958, two years after Independence. It continued in power until October 1964, when it was overthrown by a popular uprising that took the form of a general public strike and civil disobedience.

Al-Shuyu'i (The Communist) is the internal magazine for educating the members. It was first published in 1948 with the name *Alcadre* and then the name was changed to "The Communist". It is considered the main theoretical and ideological publication of the party. Sometime it has been irregular due to political and security reasons. Since its first issue and up until 2019, 159 issues have appeared.

Alkadr (The Cadre), an internal SCP publication. It is a sort of training manual for organisational matters. It is limited to members. It is now available on the website of the SCP.

Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, a military agreement between Britain and Egypt. See:

http://i-cias.com/e.o/angl_tr_egyptian.htm

Ansar Alsunna literally means "Supporters of Sunnah", the practices and sayings of Prophet Mohamed. Ansar Alsunna is a extremely fundamentalist group who adhere literally to what is in the Quran and the Sunnah. They call for the establishment of an Islamic society where all Islamic laws are implemented. They support the separation of men and women and prohibiting women from working or going outside the house. They are allied with the Saudi regime as a pioneer Ansar Sunnah government following the teaching of Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab.

Athan(Azan) is the call to prayer. It is repeated five times a day.

Azaha (Consolation) In the Sudan, if you live in a residential area or in a rural area in a village or a small town and you hear that someone has died, you are expected to participate

with other people in burying the dead and offering condolences to his or her family. After the burial those attending return home and make a tent for condolences. In this tent most of people of the residential area will come together, the women with women and men with men. It is one of the most important social customs.

Closed Areas Ordinance was issued by the colonial regime in 1921 sealing off the South from contact with the North. The ordinance prohibited any contact with southerners. Due to this, no investment or trade was possible.

Dervish A dervish is considered a holy man. He usually does not work in a fixed job and spends his life worshipping Allah and travelling from place to place. Working in agriculture, which is only three months per year, he spends the rest of his time travelling. Dervishes dress in long, green or white patchy garments. They are highly respected and people sympathise with them and give them food, shelter for short periods and clothes.

Elkhatmiya is a Sufi order headed by a religious a man who has had followers in the Eastern and Northern part of the country. Originally they came from the Higaz (as they said), Saudi Arabia, but had a strong relationship with Egypt. They established their order and practice teaching of Quran.

Fatwa This is a religious opinion. A Fatwa can only be issued by a high recognised religious authority. Until recently Sudan had a tolerant culture where religion played a cohesive factor. This trend began to change at the end of the sixties when the Muslim Brotherhood began to use Islamic slogans in political discourse. Later they purely utilised Islamic teaching to accomplish political ends.

Free Officers was an organisation established by Communists and democratic officer/soldiers in the army to fight for independence and continued in the army and other forces until 1971. All its activities were underground. After the 1969 Coup of Jaffar Numeiri, in cooperation with Free Officers, this organisation was uncovered. Differences between Jaffar and the Free

Officers led to the famous coup of 19 July 1971, which was led by Communists Officers and their allies among democratic and revolutionary officer and soldiers. The men behind the Coup held power for only three days. When Numeiri returned to power by means of a counter coup, he executed all the leaders of the coup and also executed the Sudanese Communist Party Central Committee Members, and this has been described by many as a massacre. After that, any political activity especially by left affiliated officers became very dangerous and now there no such organisation in the Armed Forces.

Gaadah This is a gathering of friends or acquaintances to drink wine. Usually people choose a house where they can sit, drink and eat. If the Gaadah is once a week or month, it will not harm anyone, but when it becomes a daily routine then it will lead to dangerous consequences. This is one of the routines that some cadres were involved in.

Ghost houses were detention centres established by the regime that came to power in the military coup perpetrated by the National Islamic Front in 1989. These detention houses were used to detain political, trade unionist and activist opponents. They were famous for their unprecedented practices of torture. They were named ghost houses because the perpetrators of torture wore masks. Detainees were held in very small rooms and deprived of all kinds of rights and freedoms. The use of torture and the systematic abuses of human rights were documented in the publications of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch etc..

HAQ The New Forces Democratic Movement. This Sudanese political movement was founded in July 1995, in London. Some of the founders resigned from the Communist Party and some came from other parties. They argued for democracy and human rights. HAQ recruited secretly in Sudan, where it now has its headquarters.

International Center for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR) is an organisation devoted to the defense of trade union rights, established in the Czech Republic by many Left Trade Unionists.

Legislative Assembly was a parliament established by the colonial government in Northern Sudan in December 1948 and continued in being until May 1952.

Military Invasion of July 1976 This was perpetrated by the National Front, a coalition of Right-wing Sudanese parties, and supported by Libya. The fighters were trained in Libya and armed with very new arsenal. The invasion was led by Brigadier Mohamed Noor Saad, a prominent Sudanese Armed Forces Officer, who was executed after the abortion of the invasion.

Military Regimes Since 1958 Sudan has been governed by the following Military Regimes: 1958-1964 First Military Regime; 1969-1985 the Second Military Regime; 1989-2019 The Third Military Regime. After 2005 and the signing of the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Accord, there was a relatively democratic space in which the SCP functioned openly. Each Military Regime Banned the Party and hunted its member and detained and imprisoned them.

Mugamalah or Milk price If a woman gives birth, or someone marries; the neighbourhood will contribute a small amount of money to help the family. It is called “Mugamalah” or “Milk price” in the case of births and “Kashif” for marriage support. In cases of death people also pay a small amount, according to their ability, to support the family, in addition, to bringing food and drinks during the condolence days.

Mihaya is a sort Quranic water. The Sheikh writes Quran Verses on a wooden slab and then washes it with water and gives the water to the patient to drink or wash with. It is believed that it cures the patient from various ailments . *Mihaya* is used for both physical and psychological sickness.

Pioneer Group: This group consisted of Ahmed Zain Alabdien, Hasan Mohamed Hamid, Altahir Alsarag, Hasan Altahir Zarrouq, Abdel Hamid, Abu Algasim Hashim, Abdel Gayoum, Mohamed Saád, Adam Abo Sininah and Ahmed Mohamed Khier. They were considered the founding fathers and pioneer in introducing Marxism teaching.

Sharia Laws of September 1983 These are widely known as the September Laws, where the **Numeiri** Regime after years of coalition with Muslim Brotherhood 1976 -1985, declared Sharia Law. The laws were Islamic in form, but were criticized by many Islamic leaders inside Sudan. The Brotherhood gained much from this period of coalition and built their significant and highly influential banking and companies system which played a central role in the coup of 1989. The Laws implemented only punishments.

Subversive Ordinance Act of 1954 This mainly targeted the SCP and its cadre describing their activities as subversive and punishable by law.

Sufi Sufis pursue a peaceful, inner, non-violent, special way of life and interpretation of Islam. A Sufi only satisfies himself with most simple rudimentary things that maintain his existence. He does not have any aspirations to reach power all the media but rather tends to remain in the shadows.

Takfiri means the unauthorised declaration of someone or organisation as an infidel. Mostly a Takfiri is an unauthorised person or opinion that narrowly interprets the Holy Quran and Hadeeth and issues judgment over a person or an organisation.